WILD ONES: CONTAINMENT CULTURE AND 1950s YOUTH REBELLION

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Abstract

"Wild Ones: Containment Culture and 1950s Youth Rebellion"

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My study seeks to fill a void in Cold War historiography by situating the emergence of 1950s youth culture in the context of containment culture, evaluating the form and extent of youth's cultural 'rebellion'. The pervasive cultural discourse of 'containment', which operated as both a foreign policy to restrict the Soviet Union's sphere of influence and a domestic policy to stifle political dissent, mandated that America propagate an image of social harmony and political plurality during the early years of the Cold War. Yet the emergence of a rebellious youth culture in the middle of the 1950s challenges the notion that America was a 'consensus society' and exposes the limitations and fissures of the white middle class hegemony that the containment narrative worked to legitimate. In examining the rise of rock n roll, the emergence of the drive-in theatre as a "teen space," and the significance of "style" to the galvanization of 1950s youth culture, this study examines the ways in which youth culture of the period variously negotiated, resisted, and accommodated containment culture.

Introduction

The Containment Narrative and 1950s Youth Culture

"The placid nineteen-fifties. Everybody dressed and spoke the same way. It was all kitchens and cars and TV sets. Where's the Pepsodent, Mom?" - Don DeLillo[1]

A 1958 episode of quintessential family sitcom The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet entitled "The Motorcycle" registers the anxiety that youth culture generated during the 1950s. The episode begins idyllically, with white middle class family man Ozzie Nelson driving his wife Harriet through the site of a new suburban development, as chirpy upbeat music accompanies them. The tranquillity of the scene is disturbed by a roaring sound that Harriet mistakes for a bulldozer; as the couple venture further they find a bunch of teenagers dressed in leather jackets and jeans trying to climb a hill on their motorbikes. Their initial curiosity turns to alarm as one of the bikers reveals himself as their eldest son, David. Ozzie, characteristically, tries to remain jovial, asking David about his friends. But Harriet can barely restrain her disgust, surveying her son's attire – the leather jacket, t-shirt, jeans and motorbike combination that was typical of the era's construction of juvenile delinquents – with a look of horror. Harriet voices her concern about the danger of David's hill-climbing, yet her eyes survey David's appearance disapprovingly, betraying her deeper fears: that her son David has turned into a juvenile delinquent.[2]

Yet, the remainder of the episode works to allay these fears. As Lynn Spigel argues, sitcoms like Ozzie and Harriet and The Donna Reed Show that depicted teenaged characters worked to domesticate the youth culture and alleviate cultural fears that were widespread during the 1950s about the sinister character of the young.[3] Indeed, in "The Motorcycle," the bikers with whom David rides are not juvenile delinquents but harmless characters; they help Ozzie change his car's flat tyre and one remarks on what a fine father Ozzie is to David. The key tension of the episode –

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[1] Don DeLillo, Underworld (New York: Scribner, 1997), p.410

[2] This episode is compiled on the videotape Ozzie and Harriet: TV Classics Collection. Dir. Ozzie Nelson. Videocassette. The Madacy Music Group, 1993

[3] Lynn Spigel, Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p.178

whether David will sell his car and buy a motorcycle – is resolved conservatively; David, reasoning that a bike would be less practical than his car, opts to retain the status quo. The episode ends with a telling indication that the motorcycle's initial threat has been successfully defused: Harriet climbs onto the motorcycle and, with a reassuring smile and wave to her family, rides the bike out of the Nelsons' driveway.

This typically upbeat ending reflected an overriding sense of optimism that pervaded American society in the 1950s. Sitcoms like Father Knows Best, Leave it to Beaver, and Make Room for Daddy suggested that postwar American society could neutralise and contain whatever minor problems it faced. This optimism was shared by intellectuals like Daniel Bell, who in previous decades had criticised American social and political institutions but now praised the new 'consensus society' that had nullified social conflict and ushered in the 'end of ideology'. Commentators of the 1950s were most enthusiastic about the postwar economic boom that produced remarkable growth: between 1947 and 1961, the national income increased over 60 percent and the group with discretionary income doubled[4]; discretionary income itself rose 49 percent between 1950 and 1960[5]; and consumer spending increased 60 percent between the end of the war and 1950, and remained high throughout the 1950s.[6] In 1959, Time correspondent Thomas Griffith captured the optimism that the boom produced when he proclaimed that "Easy Street now stretches from coast to coast."[7] Some observers predicted that the spread of the affluent society would end social conflict and guarantee America's internal stability, a belief that sitcoms like Ozzie and Harriet proselytised.

Yet, these optimistic portrayals of the 1950s fail to mention the anxiety that characterised the period. This was, after all, the first decade in which the prospect of nuclear apocalypse was ever-present. America's Cold War against the Soviet Union intensified fears surrounding the atomic bomb, especially after the Russians had, by the early 1950s, acquired both the atomic and hydrogen bomb. The Red Scare, the HUAC investigations of Hollywood and the trials of Alger Hiss and Ethel and Julius

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[4] Elaine Tyler May, Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era (Basic Books, 1988), p.165

[5] Todd Gitlin, The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), p.17

[6] May, p.165-6

[7] Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak, The Fifties: The Way We Really Were (New York: Doubleday, 1977), p.109

Rosenberg bred paranoia among the populace about the presence of Soviet spies in their midst. Many heeded Senator Joseph McCarthy's advice to search for "Reds under the bed" and kept their eyes peeled for possible Communist infiltration of their workplaces, social clubs, schools and libraries.

As Harriet's horrified expression at her son David's attire intimated, the spectre of the juvenile delinquent also sullied the era's giddy optimism. Fears about the state of the young were so intense that the juvenile delinquent challenged the Communist as the most feared cultural demon of the 1950s. From around 1953 until the late 1950s a wave of juvenile delinquency hysteria engulfed America. Reams of socio-psychological literature examined the wayward antics of adolescent miscreants. A plethora of articles in popular periodicals – among them The Saturday Evening Post's "Shame of America," Newsweek's "The Kids Grow Worse" and Cosmopolitan's "Are Teenagers Taking Over?" and "Are You Afraid of Your Teenager?" – lamented the deplorable state of the young, who were reported to be fast slipping into 'shameful' lives of delinquency. Between 1953 and 1956, the Senate commissioned a series of subcommittees to investigate the perceived delinquency scourge that was threatening civilised society. The Senate's predominant focus on the mass media's role in inciting delinquency reflected and heightened widespread public suspicions that the media was the main cause of the declining standards of youth, a suspicion that culminated in a series of comic book burnings in the middle of the decade. The head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, J. Edgar Hoover, ranked the "juvenile jungle" alongside the menace of Communism as the greatest threats to mainstream America.[8]

Hoover's comment illuminates the seldom explored connection between the rise of the youth culture in 1950s America and the Cold War.[9] Traditionally, historians, if they have considered the link at all, tend to view the rise of the youth culture as a refreshing, if somewhat trivial, aberration during the period of sustained conservatism and banality in the 1950s designated more recently as "containment

[8] Thomas Doherty, Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p.51

[9] For the purposes of this study, I define the "Cold War period" as between 1947, when Truman initiated the Red Scare, and 1960. I use 1960 as a cut-off because at that point the Cold War seemed to be thawing somewhat, with the Soviet Union and the United States enjoying more cordial relations during the Moscow kitchen debates and Khrushchev's visit to America. In the early 1960s, relations would again deteriorate during the Bay of Pigs incident and Missile Crisis in Cuba, only to thaw almost immediately as those incidents were resolved.

culture."[10] However, the rise of the youth culture was not a mere aberration within containment culture; it was inextricably linked to the phenomenon of containment. Ultimately, the dynamics of containment crucially shaped the youth culture by buttressing the conformist society against which the youth culture rebelled. The links between the youth culture and containment culture are critical not only because they point to new, compelling ways to understand the youth culture of the 1950s, but also because they remind us of how incomplete was the hegemony of the 'consensus society' of containment culture.

Containment as a Foreign Policy

The policy of containment arguably originated at the end of World War Two with America's detonation of the atomic bomb over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 to force Japan's surrender. As Howard Zinn and others have argued, the use of the Bomb was less a necessary pre-emptive measure to quash an inexhaustible foe than a deliberate display of military might to America's then-ally the Soviet Union, with whom relations were becoming increasingly strained.[11] Japan, as American military analysts were aware, was on the brink of collapse and would have lost the war within months had America pursued its conventional military strategy. The Bomb merely hastened Japan's inevitable surrender. America's desire to mobilise the Bomb, aside from scientific curiosity about its effects, was primarily intended to shut the Russians out of the peace negotiations with Japan.[12] This would ensure that Russia would not spread its sphere of influence further in the East, and also demonstrate with devastating consequences American technological prowess to what it perceived as its only remaining rival superpower.

America's use of the atomic bomb presaged its Cold War foreign policy of containment towards the perceived threat of encroaching Communism, and containment would soon come to characterise its domestic policy towards political dissidence as well. America's detonation of the bomb in Japan testified to America's

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[10] See Alan Nadel, Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) and Andrew Ross, No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture (New York: Routledge, 1989), among others, for analyses of "containment culture."

[11] Howard Zinn, A People's History of the United States: From 1492 to the Present (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), p.413. A similar argument was advanced in Gar Alperovitz, Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965)

[12] Zinn, p.415

misplaced belief in being able to contain forces and events that were beyond its control. It indicated that America believed it could contain the Soviet sphere of influence through its unassailable military superiority. Such a conviction relied on the belief that America could contain the spread of nuclear technology; that it could guard its atomic secrets and preserve its nuclear monopoly. Also, it testified to the belief that America could contain the harmful effects of the Bomb, like radiation. Advocates of nuclearism, applying pseudo-scientific methodology, proselytised this belief by lauding the benefits of nuclear technology and predicting, among other things, that radiation could be harnessed to aid agriculture.[13]

Of course, all of these beliefs were delusional. America's display of technological aptitude merely intensified the Soviet Union's desires to pursue its own nuclear program. America could not protect its nuclear "secrets" because the scientific knowledge required to build such weapons was already widely disseminated among the scientific community. What was not so well known were the destructive effects of the Bomb. To a large extent, the danger radiation posed came as a surprise to scientists deployed to Hiroshima to monitor the damage of the blast. The best these scientists could do was devise methods of measuring radiation, rather than containing its deadly residue, as several "miscalculations" of the drift of radioactive materials following atomic testing in the Pacific and on the American mainland during the late 1940s and early 1950s demonstrated.[14] America's inability to contain the effects of the atom bomb and its knowledge of nuclear technology exposed some of the fallacies of its much-vaunted containment logic.

America's faith in containment persisted nonetheless. The Truman administration pursued the foreign policy of containment at the behest of diplomat George Kennan. In his pivotal 'long telegram' from Moscow, Kennan outlined "containment." Kennan, who worked as a diplomat in Moscow during the initiation of Cold War hostilities, urged America to depart radically from its pre-war policy of isolationism and instead protect its interests from what he perceived as a Communist foe bent on expansionism. Seeing the Soviets as more of a political and economic threat than a military one, he posited that the best method of countering the Russian threat was to encircle Soviet territory and ensure that it did not expand its sphere of

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[13] Allan M Winkler, Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.137-8

[14] See The Atomic Café. Dir. Kevin Rafferty. Videocassette. New Video, 1982

influence further. This necessitated that America increase its influence strategically in Europe and Asia.

Kennan, despite downplaying the urgency of the Soviet threat[15], justified this ambitious, pre-emptive strategy by emphasising the pathology of the Soviets. He portrayed world "Communism [as] a malignant parasite, which feeds only on diseased tissue"[16] and stressed the inevitability of strained relations between the two powers:

> Basically, the [Soviet] antagonism remains. It is postulated. And from it flow many of the phenomena which we find disturbing in the Kremlin's conduct of foreign policy: the secretiveness, the lack of frankness, the duplicity, the wary suspiciousness, and the basic unfriendliness of purpose…. Its political action is a fluid stream which moves constantly, wherever it is permitted to move, toward a given goal. Its main concern is to make sure it has filled every nook and cranny available to it in the basin of world power.[17]

He depicted Soviet leadership as megalomaniacal ideologues and the Russian people as brainwashed automatons:

> Once a given party line has been laid down on a given issue of current policy, the whole Soviet governmental machine, including the mechanism of diplomacy, moves inexorably along the prescribed path, like a persistent toy automobile wound up and headed in a given direction, stopping only when it meets with some unanswerable force. The individuals who are the components of this machine are unamenable to argument or reason which comes to them from outside sources…. Like the white dog before the phonograph, they hear only the "master's voice."[18]

Because of the intransigence of Soviet policy and the blind obstinacy of its adherents, in Kennan's estimation diplomacy alone was futile. Rather, America needed to engage a geopolitical strategy to stifle the Soviet Union. Kennan's advocacy of containment was based on his belief that the Russian machine could be stymied and frustrated, that its "fluid" emissions could be blocked.

As Alan Nadel argues, containment practised foreign policy as a kind of courtship ritual. The "fluid" metaphors Kennan mobilises imply sexual impulse; according to Nadel, Soviet imperialism is likened to the desire to inseminate

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[15] Kennan portrayed the Soviets as immensely patient due to their unwavering belief in the inevitable decay of capitalism. He added that this caused them to be in no hurry to achieve their imperialistic objectives.

[16] Quoted in Ross p.47

[17] Quoted in Nadel, p.16

[18] George Kennan, "The Long Telegram written by X" available on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_telegram accessed 13/4/05

surrounding nations with the Communist seed. Thus, the policy Kennan advocates is to encircle the Soviet Union with its (sexually) incompatible rival, capitalism. By depriving the Russians of (sexual) partners to accept its "fluid stream" - "receptors for their seminal flow," as Nadel puts it[19] - containment works to, in Kennan's words, "increase enormously the strains under which Soviet policy must operate… and in this way to promote tendencies which must eventually find their outlet in either the break-up or gradual mellowing of Soviet power. [For the Kremlin cannot] face frustration indefinitely without eventually adjusting itself in one way or another…."[20]

This "adjustment," Kennan suggested, would result in something akin to sexual dysfunction. To encircle the Soviets effectively and induce this frustration, Kennan advocated engaging the Soviets less in a strategic military-based imperial contest than a diplomatic and political courtship rivalry. That is, the United States would seduce potential Soviet partners away from a dalliance with Russia through displays of American attractiveness: "decisiveness, power, spiritual vitality."[21] Thus, containment rested on America's ability to promote its potency, and to bring into relief, by counterexample, the Soviet Union's impotence.

Kennan emphasised the importance of public relations in creating this effect:

> This is not only a question of the modest measure of informational activity which this government [the United States] can conduct in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, although that, too, is important. It is rather a question of the degree to which the United States can create among the peoples of the world generally the impression of a country which knows what it wants, which is coping successfully with the problem of its internal life and with the responsibilities of a World Power, and which has a spiritual vitality capable of holding its own among the major ideological currents of the time. To the extent that such an impression can be created and maintained, the aims of Russian Communism must appear sterile and quixotic, the hopes and enthusiasms of Moscow's supporters must wane, and added strain must be imposed on the Kremlin's foreign policies.[22]

Kennan's strategy required the United States to create the impression of – not necessarily actually achieve – internal social harmony and "spiritual vitality." Again, the sexual overtones of Kennan's ideas are clear: once American "vitality" is proven

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[19] Nadel, p.17

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Kennan, "Long Telegram"

to potential partners, the Soviets are rendered "sterile" (suggesting that the 'seeds' of Communist ideology will not 'flower'), the "enthusiasms of Moscow's supporters… wane" and the frustrated strain of unconsummated seduction is felt by the Kremlin.

By contrast, any signs of America's "indecision, disunity and internal disintegration… have an exhilarating effect on the whole Communist movement… [as] a thrill of hope and excitement goes through the Communist world; a new jauntiness can be noted in the Moscow tread… and Russian pressure increases all along the line in international affairs."[23] Again, Russia's ability to increase its insertion of "pressure" "all along the line" is commensurate with the exhilaration and excitement pulsating throughout the Communist world. Practised effectively, containment, Kennan asserts, ensures that "Russia will remain economically a vulnerable, and in a certain sense an impotent, nation, capable of exporting its enthusiasms and of radiating the strange charm of its primitive political vitality but unable to back up those articles of export by the real evidences of material power and prosperity."[24] In other words, containment will demonstrate that America has the goods to back up its seduction, whereas as a suitor the Soviet Union will never be able to consummate satisfactorily.

Although practiced in such diverse and idiosyncratic ways by subsequent administrations as to render the policy of containment almost incoherent, one common thread of containment was America's obsession over its public image internationally. In other words, America worried about how it looked to the international gaze, about how attractive it appeared to potential partners. This concern was manifest in the public relations efforts to portray policies like the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine as motivated solely by altruism rather than political self-interest. America's fear of damaging its international reputation was also instrumental in compelling President Eisenhower to enforce Brown v Board of Education in Little Rock in 1957, a step that forced Southern schools to desegregate.

The violent opposition to the integration of Little Rock's Central High School was one of many well-publicised incidents during the 1950s that highlighted America's racism. Such incidents stained America's international image and proved a major impediment to its courtship of non-white nations. For example, throughout the

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

month of September 1957, newspapers throughout the world carried coverage of developing events in Little Rock, much to the embarrassment of the United States. Moreover, it provided terrific public relations fodder for the Soviets to exploit. Soviet newspapers carried banner headlines like "Troops Advance Against Children!"[25] The cancellation of Louis Armstrong's goodwill tour to the Soviet Union in 1957 further embarrassed the United States. Armstrong, who was generally apolitical regarding race, cited his anger over Little Rock as the reason for his cancellation, saying "The people over there [Soviet Union] ask me, 'What's with my country?' What am I supposed to say?"[26]

American magazine Confidential was among many publications that lamented the harm such incidents as Little Rock did to America's international image. Displacing widespread American racism onto segregationist Governor Orval Faubus of Arkansas, it questioned whether Faubus was a Communist agent for "he handed to the Communists the handsomest gift they could have possibly received from any American. Four-fifths of the people of the world are colored. All over the world – in Asia and Europe, in Africa and the Middle East – the Communists have invoked the name of Little Rock to tell colored people that the United States is a land of lynching and repression."[27] Tellingly, the main concern for the author of this Confidential piece was not that black Americans were being denied access to equal educational facilities as whites, or that blacks were lynched and repressed. What was scandalous was that international publicity of these events provided Communists with the opportunity to impugn America's credentials as suitor to these "colored" nations. This bad publicity accentuated America's hypocrisy in wishing to court "colored" nations while prohibiting interracial relations, especially miscegenation, at home.

The Cold War intensified, both as a public relations battle and as an actual conflict, as the Soviet Union and America attempted to enlarge their spheres of influence. The Soviet Union's growing influence in Eastern Europe presented an obstacle to America's postwar ambitions to expand economic interests in Europe. Meanwhile, Russia increasingly viewed American efforts to contribute to the rebuilding of Europe after the war with scepticism and paranoia. This atmosphere of

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[25] Mary L. Dudziak, Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p.121

[26] Mike Pinfold, Louis Armstrong: His Life and Times (New York: Universe Books, 1987), p.111

[27] Dudziak, p.124

distrust would fuel a number of stand-offs and proxy clashes waged on foreign territory for the next two decades.

Containment as Domestic Policy

In anticipation of further conflict emanating from such simmering tensions, America did not demilitarise following World War Two. The continuation of a wartime economy also worked as insurance against a postwar slump in industrial growth and a widely-feared return to the hardship of the depression years. This maintenance of wartime spending ensured postwar prosperity and also solidified the government's wartime alliance with big business as the government increasingly invested in what Eisenhower termed (and viewed with suspicion) the "military-industrial complex." In effect, in the postwar period the American government, which had seemed so hostile to monopoly capitalism during the Roosevelt administration of the 1930s, sponsored the rise of large corporations (providing sizable contracts to firms engaged in defence-related projects) at the expense of both workers and smaller competitive businesses.

The coalition between big business and government fused around the principles of corporate liberalism, which George Lipsitz defines as

> a kind of neopaternalism in which those in power seek popular legitimacy by making some concessions to potentially dissident groups in order to give them a stake in preserving the system. Monopolistic corporations interested in long-range stability wanted to avoid conflict and create a climate for stable investments and earnings and would, when necessary, endorse concessions to bring about that result.[28]

During the Red Scare, however, monopolistic corporations granted few concessions to potentially dissident groups to avoid conflict and stabilise the economic climate. With the tacit approval of the government, monopolistic corporations purged their organisations of radical elements by accusing them of Communist sympathies. The Taft-Hartley Act, passed in 1947, was a crucial instrument for crushing dissidents. This Act required officers of labour unions to sign affidavits pledging that the officer was not a member of the Communist party, and did not "believe in, and is not a member of or supports any organization that believes in or teaches, the overthrow of

[28] George Lipsitz, Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.60

the United States Government by force or by any illegal or unconstitutional methods."[29]

The Red Scare purged the unions of radical left-wing elements and frightened existing union leaders into aligning with the interests of big business. In 1948 Philip Murray, president of union collective Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), reflected how the Red Scare had effectively removed class from trade union consciousness when he stated: "We have no class in this country; that's why the Marxist theory of the class struggle has gained so few adherents."[30] The Taft-Hartley Act and the loyalty oath programs that followed indicated that patriotism now equated to support for monopoly capital. Former New Dealer David Lilienthal, who was an outspoken critic of big business in the 1930s, exemplified this attitudinal shift when he proclaimed in 1952 that "[b]igness in industry is itself one of the most effective ways – sometimes the only effective way – to maintain competition… bigness can be an expression of the heroic size of man himself as he comes to a new-found greatness."[31]

The Cold War thus facilitated the rise of monopoly capital in the United States. The Cold War provided an enemy that justified America's continuation of a wartime economy. Moreover, by contrasting America with the spectre of the aggressive, imperialistic, ideologically brainwashed and government-controlled Communist Soviet Union, American Cold War propagandists recast patriotism to entail unwavering support of the free market system. Internationally, this was enshrined in the Truman Doctrine in 1947, which, despite its stated intention to protect established foreign governments from "armed minorities," was America's declaration to intervene in foreign conflicts wherever right-wing governments with economic ties to the United States were under threat from dissident elements, especially Communists.[32] Under the guise of defending democratic countries from the tyranny of Communism, America could expand its military and economic influence in

[29] Dudziak, p.28

[30] Lipsitz, p.192

[31] Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak, The Fifties: The Way We Really Were (New York: Doubleday, 1977), p.114

[32] Lipsitz, p.183-5

foreign countries without appearing imperialistic. In turn, this would protect and expand markets for American goods and solidify the dominance of big businesses.

At home, government intervention in business matters was suddenly considered suspect and unpatriotic. Any threats to the smooth operation of American industry, such as labour strikes, were considered threats to national security. President Truman took this logic one step further when, in a speech deliberately designed to "scare the hell out of the American people," (as Truman allegedly remarked to a colleague) he initiated the Red Scare by demanding loyalty oaths from government employees after he announced that Communist spies had infiltrated government departments and attempted to corrupt American democracy.[33] From 1947 through the 1950s, various sectors of American industry set about eradicating subversive elements, ostensibly Communists, from their midst. While the Red Scare unearthed few Communists, it succeeded in stifling, and in some instances eradicating, resistance against the 'patriotic' corporate liberal agenda.

The Containment Narrative

Following Truman's initiation of the Red Scare, American popular culture was saturated with representations of Communists that borrowed and embellished metaphors central to Kennan's thesis. Communism was regularly imagined to be a communicable disease, with Communists cast as robotic, brainwashed agents of Russia who ought to be quarantined lest they infect the general population. Containment was prescribed as the best way of treating the Communist scourge domestically as well as internationally.[34] Alan Nadel argues that in a series of narratives, containment was inculcated into the national psyche. He posits that the "story of containment had derived its logic from the rigid major premise that the world was divided into two monolithic camps, one dedicated to promoting the inextricable combination of capitalism, democracy, and (Judeo-Christian) religion, and one seeking to destroy that ideological amalgamation by any means."[35] In addition to functioning as a foreign and domestic policy, containment "also names the

[33] Ibid., p.201

[34] Ross argues that the containment thesis was more systematically and effectively mobilised domestically than internationally. Ross, p.46

[35] Nadel, p.3

rhetorical strategy that functioned to foreclose dissent, preempt dialogue, and preclude contradiction."[36] But, crucially, he also observes that:

> under the common name of containment we have generated numerous, often contradictory or mutually exclusive, stories, each grounding its authority in the claim that it is part of the same story. Without that story, none of the narratives would have the authority to generate the actions committed in its name; at the same time the claim to a common narrative renders the narrative itself incoherent.[37]

In other words, although the containment narrative was supposedly encased in airtight logic to the extent that it was presented to the American public as unquestionable "common sense," the range of "stories" that grounded their authority in its logic threatened to collapse the narrative into incoherence. The containment narrative was, as Nadel puts it, "a free-floating signifier designating an infinity of possible referents,"[38] a rhetorical device used to cloak and legitimate ideological discourse as "common sense."

We can refer, then, to a 'containment narrative', recognising that it was an idealised, overdetermined master narrative of the Cold War period that was riddled with fissures, contradictions and inconsistencies. Put simply, containment was founded on the conservative premise of defending 'sameness' against 'difference', which was imagined as a menacing threat emanating from outside the harmonious national consensus. Difference or 'otherness' was frequently constructed according to the disease metaphors of Kennan's thesis; the pathogenic other needed to be quarantined from the otherwise healthy general population in the interests of national security.

The containment narrative was contested to the extent that divergent and often opposing "stories" sought to yoke themselves to the containment narrative to ground their authority, but the plausibility of the narrative itself was seldom challenged. For example, during the school integration crisis at Little Rock, both segregationists and integrationists sought to legitimate their arguments by positioning themselves within the containment narrative. Some segregationists insisted that outside forces ('others') were conspiring to infiltrate Southern politics and assist the NAACP, which was

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[36] Ibid., p.14

[37] Ibid., p.18

[38] Ibid.

secretly sponsored by the Communists, to become politically dominant in the region. As we have seen, integrationists, on the other hand, accused segregationists of complicity with the Communist cause for harming America's international image. Despite their ideological differences, both sought legitimacy by situating themselves within the containment narrative and ultimately contributed to the authority of the containment narrative to set the parameters of political discourse.

Middle Class Hegemony and the Evisceration of the Working Class

That authority was used by what Jackson Lears calls "a hegemonic historical bloc" to win the spontaneous consent of the populace during the postwar period. As the instance of Little Rock adversaries appealing to the same rhetorical strategy indicates, this hegemonic 'consensus' was highly fractured. Nevertheless, as Lears suggests, this bloc – "a coalition of groups which differed in many ways but which were bound together (up to a point) by common interests, common experiences and a common worldview" – had been forming since the early twentieth century. Only in the postwar period, though, did this loose coalition of "professional/managerial groups" (including salaried managers, administrators, academics, technicians and journalists) exercise political, economic and cultural hegemony.[39] The bloc achieved this hegemony by identifying "its own problems and interests with those of society and indeed humanity at large" through containment.[40]

By appealing to the containment ideology that stressed the exigencies of the Communist threat, this bloc repressed dissent against the corporate liberal principles that ensured its political and economic dominance. By equating dissent with disloyalty, this bloc thwarted the attempts of other potential 'blocs' to exercise power by severely limiting the discursive terrain on which to challenge it. For example, although America's need to ameliorate its race relations problems in the eyes of foreign nations provided impetus to civil rights groups, the containment narrative narrowed the scope of acceptable protest against racial oppression. As Mary Dudziak argues, because of the exigencies of America's foreign policy of containing the Soviet sphere of influence, during the late 1940s and early 1950s civil rights groups could

[39] T. Jackson Lears, "A Matter of Taste: Corporate Cultural Hegemony in a Mass Consumption Society" in Lary May (ed.), Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p.50-1

[40] Ibid.

not link America's treatment of black people at home to international struggles against colonialism for fear of being branded 'unpatriotic'. Moreover, many of these anti-colonial movements were informed by Marxist political ideology, which was considered the enemy of America's 'free democracy'. Also, the "narrow boundaries of Cold War-era civil rights politics kept discussions of broad-based social change, or a linking or race and class, off the agenda."[41] The containment narrative's family ideal that worked, as we will see, to keep women out of the workplace also eviscerated potential counter-hegemonic alliances between marginalised groups like women, blacks and working class whites.

Moreover, containment worked to legitimise the hegemony of this middle-class bloc by removing class rhetoric from acceptable political discourse and appealing to the notion of a 'universal middle-class'. In effect, the notion of a 'working class identity' was deemed not only passé but unpatriotic. The Red Scare was pivotal to this assault on working class identity as countersubversives effectively linked class rhetoric with Communism, disabling workers' attempts to organise politically along class lines.

The massive migration from urban centres to the suburbs in the 1950s also proved an impediment to the formation of a working class consciousness and worked to naturalise the containment narrative's notion of a universal middle class. Big businesses recognised that suburban relocation served their interests in solidifying their control over workers. The report of a San Francisco businessmen's association meeting in 1948 reflected this belief. It suggested that urban factories where workers lived in close proximity to one another posed a potent threat of class conflict (and thus, they assumed, Communism). The report advocated dispersing industries with large concentrations of workers away from urban centres to smaller suburban areas in order to stifle worker solidarity.[42]

As Lynn Spigel argues, the suburbs offered residents a site for the formation of newly-defined identities that broke with those fostered in close urban neighbourhoods, which had often been intimately related to working class movements

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[41] Dudziak, p.11-13. If one takes the "Cold War-era" here to mean the Red Scare era, from approximately 1947 until the mid-1950s, then I would concur with Dudziak's claim, although by the late 1950s and early 1960s, Martin Luther King increasingly linked issues of class to the civil rights struggle.

[42] Elaine Tyler May, Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p.169-70

and culture.[43] According to Elaine Tyler May, in the suburbs "[k]in and ethnic ties were forsaken as suburban residents formed new communities grounded in shared experiences of homeownership and childrearing, and conformity to the new consumer-oriented way of life."[44] In other words, suburbanites actively identified themselves as 'middle class' at the expense of older ethnic identities forged in urban working class communities.

As Ozzie and Harriet's tour of a suburban development at the beginning of "The Motorcycle" episode suggests, films and television programs worked to normalise both suburban migration and the notion of the 'universal' (but exclusively white) middle class. As Spigel argues, 1950s television situation comedies often worked to alleviate suburbanites' alienation. Suburban migration severed traditional familial ties to close urban communities, and television sitcoms helped suburbanites adjust to their isolated surrounds by providing the illusion of a distanced yet comforting neighbourhood community.[45] Films and television programs also often demonstrated the normalcy of breaking urban ethnic and class ties to conform to the suburban ideal. Spigel argues that "it was the particular aim of the mass media – especially television – to level class and ethnic difference in order to produce a homogeneous public for national advertisers. In the early 1950s, as television became a national medium, the networks continually drew on the image of the white, middle-class family audience when devising programming and promotional strategies."[46]

In arguing for the enervation of the working class, I do not mean to suggest that the working class was entirely eradicated in the postwar period. Rather, I assert that the Red Scare and growth of middle class hegemony impeded the active formation of working class identity and disabled working class collective political strength. Some signs of working class collectivism remained. Pete Daniel suggests that in the South NASCAR (National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing) and country music thrived as working class-inflected culture that resisted postwar

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[43] Spigel, p.6

[44] Elaine Tyler May, p.25

[45] Spigel, p.129-30

[46] Ibid., p.6

embourgeoisement.[47] But these pockets of class-based resistance were rare. Working class identity was increasingly marginalised in dominant representations of mainstream America in the 1950s. Such representations encouraged people who, in the past, may have identified with the 'working class' because of their economic or occupational status, now to buy into the 'classless' myth of the postwar suburban ideal. The 1952 Purdue poll of American high school students shows how pervasive notions of a universal middle class were, as the vast majority of students labelled themselves 'middle class', including 47 percent of all students whose fathers were unskilled labourers and 48 percent of all students from "low" income families.[48]

In assessing the role of the working class in the ascent of postwar middle class hegemony, Lears argues that "working-class participation in a national consensus remained limited and ambiguous."[49] He suggests that working class people "felt an inescapable sense of inner conflict," in that "they deemed their class inferiority [measured against dominant representations] as a sign of personal failure, even as many realized they had been constrained by class origins they could not control."[50] Lears's argument is largely compelling; dominant representations of reality according to middle class values did not exactly mesh with the lived experiences of Americans whose economic status precluded them from enjoying full enfranchisement in the postwar consumer market. These people may well have interpreted this dissonance between lived experience and cultural ideal as the result of personal failure.

However, Lears's argument does not recognise the incentives 'middle class' identification offered. The postwar explosion in suburban housing developments, as well as the postwar economic boom and the GI Bill[51] that provided many working people with the means to purchase these new homes allowed these Americans to bridge the gap between cultural ideal and lived experience. But the suburbs promised Americans more than just a place to live. Aspiring to the suburban ideal provided

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[47] Pete Daniel, Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p.117, 121-47

[48] Beth Bailey, From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p.10-11

[49] Lears, p.51-2

[50] Ibid., p.52

[51] The GI Bill enabled white war veterans to take out low interest no-payment down bank loans to buy houses.

Americans with a sense of security after years of upheaval and dislocation following depression and war. Living the 'American Dream' of upward mobility through one's consumer purchases also seemed the most effective and patriotic response, according to the pervasive containment narrative, to the threat of Communism. Attaining the suburban family ideal was thought to provide an effective bulwark against both Communist infiltration and nuclear devastation. Although working people may indeed have sensed inner conflict and personal failure in the face of pervasive middle class hegemony, suburbia's promise of security provided the incentive for many Americans to embrace notions of 'classless' society at the heart of America's containment narrative.

As Andrew Ross argues, intellectuals played a pivotal role in legitimising middle class hegemony in the postwar period. In the 1920s and 1930s intellectuals generally occupied a position independent of the ruling ideology and the intellectual's voice was often "that of the vanguard missionary or that of the saving remnant," but during the postwar period intellectuals distanced themselves from their former radicalism.[52] In the wake of the Red Scare, liberal intellectuals like Daniel Bell, for example, former editor of socialist journal New Leader, repudiated Marxist categories of analysis, and declared the "end of ideology."[53] As cultural deputies to the postwar hegemonic formation, intellectuals occupied a new role as monitors of the health of the national culture.[54] Generally, intellectuals oscillated between two extremes. On the one hand, intellectuals like Dwight MacDonald lamented the reluctance of the "popular class" to embrace High Culture, and deplored their preference for kitsch and objects of 'low' aesthetic value. On the other hand, many intellectuals, like David Riesman, praised popular culture's ability to inculcate the populace into 'consensus' society.[55] Within universities, academic teaching reflected leading intellectuals' proclamations of the 'end of ideology' by embracing New Criticism, an analytical approach that eschewed considerations of social context, authorial intention and ideology in favour of hermetically close readings of literary texts.

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[52] Ross, p.51

[53] Daniel Bell, The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties (Glencoe: Free Press, 1960)

[54] Ross, p.51

[55] Ibid., p.51-3

Intellectuals contributed, then, to a debate over what constituted a 'healthy' level of exposure to popular culture. In entering this debate, intellectuals had to legitimate their claim to cultural dominance without evoking class as a workable category lest they be mistaken for closet Marxists and expose the fiction of American classlessness. They established their cultural superiority by erecting hierarchical categories of social difference that both denied the existence of class difference and masked the hegemonic bloc's cultural dominance. Thus intellectuals tended to portray a diverse, pluralistic 'consensus', glued together by the spontaneous consent of all social groups. Intellectuals were both suspicious, in the wake of fascism in Europe, of the vulnerability of the masses to propaganda yet, on the surface at least, confident to proclaim American exceptionalism as an effective bulwark against such manipulation. Hence they cultivated benign categories of social difference organised around, for example, cultural taste – like Dwight MacDonald's "lowcult, midcult and highcult" – that ultimately stressed social pluralism and cohesion rather than class conflict.[56]

Containment was crucial to legitimating the hegemony of this bloc. It provided the ideological grounds for government support of and investment in big business. As a foreign policy, containment furnished the volatile international conditions that were needed to justify the manufacture, development and stockpiling of weapons, abetting the dominance of the military-industrial complex. Moreover, containment ideology situated Soviet Communism as the absolute antithesis of the American economic and ideological system, in effect casting the Cold War as America's fight to preserve and expand its free market system. As domestic policy, containment enabled monopoly capital to implement corporate liberal principles in workplace relations, whereby small concessions would be granted to workers in order to preserve industrial peace. The few concessions that monopolistic corporations granted were predicated on the fact that the fundamental relationship between capital and labour was fixed to capital's advantage. Containment ideology ensured this because under containment logic any attempt to alter working conditions to workers' advantage could be cast as tantamount to Communist affiliation and therefore treason.[57]

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[56] Ross, p.56-61

[57] Lipsitz, p.190

The Crisis of Masculinity, the Family Ideal and Containment

Yet, despite containment's central role in legitimating postwar hegemony, there were a number of disjunctions between containment ideology and the interests of America's expanding economy, especially on the domestic front. The shifting expectations surrounding masculinity in the postwar period highlight these disjunctions. The demands of big business necessitated a hegemonic masculinity commonly identified by the image of the man in the grey flannel suit. The expanding American economy needed managers to direct the flow of products and information. As American capitalism became increasingly characterised by centralised monopolies rather than competitive businesses, the ranks of big business employees swelled, managerial hierarchies became more complexly tiered, and job descriptions became more specific and compartmentalised. As many critics of the corporate economy argued, the postwar worker was increasingly isolated from production, and dealt instead in more intangible tasks like public relations and promotions. Sociologist David Riesman famously diagnosed the corporate man as 'other-directed', lamenting: "Today it is the 'softness' of men rather than the 'hardness' of material that calls on talent and opens new channels of social mobility."[58] To progress in this dense corporate world – to win promotion to the next tier – the man in the grey flannel suit had to conform to corporate liberal ideology by fitting seamlessly into the processes of the company, as an interchangeable cog in the corporate machine, and 'conformity' became the by-word for the national male malaise.[59]

The containment narrative cast gender identity as crucial to national security, inflaming anxieties surrounding the era's crisis of masculinity. Questions arose about the capability of men who spent their days in comfortable offices, pampered by air-conditioning, working lunches and a sedentary lifestyle to fight the ruthless Communist enemy. By taking orders from others and following others' agendas, the corporate man seemed to be sacrificing his individuality and mimicking his robotic unquestioning Communist foe. Even worse, his increasing reliance on verbal rather than physical prowess, his growing devotion to pleasing others, and his interpellation into the world of consumer spending was, some speculated, making him effeminate,

[58] Barbara Ehrenreich, The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment (London: Pluto Press, 1983), p.34

[59] Ibid., p.30

or 'less than a man' (the 1950s term suggesting homosexuality[60]). As an enfeebled, effeminate, 'other-directed' being, this man was deemed by some as incapable of functioning as an adequate masculine role model for his son to follow. The corporate man's confused gender status, some feared, would produce a generation of sissies, perverts and delinquents.

Chillingly, world events in the 1950s seemed to justify these anxieties. The growing influence of Communism in the East, coupled with indications of Soviet technological progress, if not superiority, in the forms of nuclear proliferation and the launching of Sputnik into orbit, seemed to testify to Soviet advance and American stagnation. While Soviet men were pushing the frontiers of science, American men were being examined for unprecedented rates of heart disease and stress.[61] Anxious observers of the American man prognosticated dire implications for the state of American manhood. As Look magazine put it in 1958, "scientists worry that in the years since the end of World War II, [the American male] has changed radically and dangerously; that he is no longer the masculine, strong-minded man who pioneered the continent and built America's greatness."[62] In terms of American foreign policy based on the courtship ritual, such concerns about American masculinity had a global dimension; could it be that it was America, not the Soviet Union, that lacked potency?

Despite being riddled with contradictions, the containment narrative worked as the ideological counterpart to the growth of American capitalism. In part, the urgency of the perceived threat posed by the Communists, who, propagandists insisted, were engaged in a relentless and ruthless struggle to subvert and defeat America, prohibited explicit challenges to the plausibility of the containment narrative. At the same time, the strength of American capitalism, especially its expansion into foreign markets, held these contradictions in place. Paradoxically, the Cold War's invention of the Communist enemy licensed this expansion under the guise of protecting democracy from tyranny, yet many suspected that the hegemonic type of masculinity required to consolidate this economic strength was inadequate to grapple with the Communist foe that threatened these foreign markets. In short, America needed yet reviled the man in the grey flannel suit.

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[60] Ibid., p.11-2

[61] Ibid., p.71-4

[62] Steve Cohan, Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), p.6

But, intriguingly, the era's crisis of masculinity often did not focus on the male role. Rather, women were most often held to blame for emasculating men. As Steve Cohan argues, this was a common tactic of displacing the containment narrative's contradictions

> by displacing the political (the realm of the state and the site where the crisis of meaning occurs) onto the personal (the realm of the domestic and the site where the crisis can be more easily contained)…. This is not simply a matter of polarizing masculinity against a feminine Other, but of shifting anxiety about the state's political control onto concern about excessive feminine influence over domestic life.[63]

Whether constructed as overly assertive working women encroaching upon traditional male occupational spheres, as gold-digging housewives pushing their husbands towards early graves through their consumerist excess, or as domineering castrating matriarchs, women were frequently demonised as the root cause of men's woes. To escape such demonisation, women were expected to embrace the era's rigid gender standards in order to allow men room to recuperate their masculinity after the war years when women participated actively in the economy. In effect, the consternation directed at male gender roles precipitated a reassessment of gender roles in men's favour, as women were increasingly pressured into submissive, domestic roles in the postwar reconstruction of the family for the ostensible purpose of shoring up national security.

The accelerating birth rate during the baby boom of the 1940s and 1950s should have alleviated doubts about the potency of the American male. Yet, the baby boom seemed instead to evince women's tremendous fecundity rather than men's virility. Popular representations of the period seldom linked growing birth rates with male potency; rather, they were linked to the productivity and fertility of the feminised sphere, the suburban home. The elevated birth rate, moreover, redoubled the pressure on men to work hard to provide for their ever-expanding families and, some alleged, made men subject to the needs of the domestic (feminine) sphere.[64] Like the crisis of masculinity, these fears ultimately worked in the interests of

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[63] Ibid., p.141-2

[64] Misogynistic social commentator Philip Wylie was not alone in alleging an evil female conspiracy, whereby women pushed men into the emasculated corporate atmosphere, and then nagged them so hard to succeed that they sent men to early death. He surmised that women could profit off life insurance and bathe in their husband's success once the breadwinner had passed on. Thus, he concluded, women "own America by mere parasitism." Ehrenreich, p.36-8

patriarchy by licensing the repression of female sexuality. Certainly, the sexual economy of the courtship rituals worked to contain this threatening female sexuality; women were valued either 'cheap' or 'worthy' depending on their ability to suppress their own sexual impulses and parry male desire. The only legitimate outlet for women's carnal urges was within the family home, within the patriarchal institution of marriage.

As an ideological project, the postwar reconstruction of the family was married to the containment narrative. One ubiquitous trope of the containment narrative was the patriarchal nuclear family's role as a bulwark against Communist infiltration. The 'healthy' family was imagined to be impervious to Communist infestation. Sexual dysfunction characterised representations of Communism; Communist men were frequently depicted as sexually perverted (usually cast as homosexual, which was widely considered 'perverted' in the 1950s), and Communist women were deemed androgynous, asexual beings, concerned only with work and directives from the Kremlin. By contrast, the ideals of the companionate marriage and patriarchal dominance practised in 'typical' American nuclear families were considered 'normal' and 'healthy'. Since Communism only fed on "diseased tissue," as Kennan put it, the sturdy moral fabric of the idyllic American family would repel the Communist parasite. It was patriotic to fulfil the tenets of the heterosexual companionate marriage and be a dominant husband or a submissive wife, for it preserved American freedom. Domestically, then, containment ideology was inherently conservative, espousing 'traditional' gender roles that were easily disseminated, reproduced and monitored.

It was up to 'experts' to monitor these conservative social roles. A raft of professionals from the broad field of social psychology – psychiatrists, psychotherapists, sociologists, criminologists and other public health officials – exercised their hegemony by policing gender and familial 'normality'. As Elaine Tyler May argues, experts helped suburban couples adjust to the rigours of middle class gender expectations: "With the help of experts to guide them, successful breadwinners would provide economic support for professionalized homemakers, and together they would create the home of their dreams."[65] In addition to cultivating domestic harmony, experts also defined the limits of 'normality' by diagnosing

[65] Elaine Tyler May, p.28

individuals who failed to measure up to hegemonic ideals as pathological deviants, labelling them psychopaths, perverts and schizophrenics. The exigencies of containment always underlay their authority; the demarcation and isolation of abnormality was always implicitly a matter of national security.

The booming postwar economy's need to create new products and markets was fundamentally antithetical to containment's conservatism. Containment relies on the perpetuation of stable and rigid binaries, and on the strict policing of these boundaries. Consumer capitalism, however, relies on the constant expansion of markets and products, and on the growth of representational media to promote these products and cultivate these markets. Capitalism requires the 'flow' of goods and services and their dissemination in the economy, as well as on the perpetual expansion of boundaries. Although containment constituted the dominant ideology of the postwar period, the postwar economic boom created ever more boundaries for containment to police. As Jon Savage puts it, in the 1950s "the overwhelming drive on the part of capital to find new markets and new products steam-rollered previously rigid moral codes and social boundaries."[66]

Although the policy of containing Communism abroad legitimated corporate liberal principles at home and enabled American global hegemony under the Truman administration, when this containment logic was applied domestically, it did not fit so neatly with corporate liberal principles. For example, the fight against Communism demanded a 'hard' masculinity that could combat a devious foe. 'Weak men', as Wini Brienes argues, were linked "with homosexuality and a less aggressive and militaristic foreign policy."[67] Yet corporate liberalism demanded conformity at the workplace, which signified "a kind of emasculation."[68] For consumer markets to thrive and the postwar economic boom to continue men also had to consume fervently, which required eager participation in the 'feminised' sphere of consumption, as suggested earlier. To many, these corporate liberal principles posed a threat to the 'hard' masculinity needed to defeat Communism.

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[66] Jon Savage, "The Enemy Within: Sex, Rock and Identity" in Simon Frith (ed), Facing the Music (New York: Pathenon Books, 1988), p.139

[67] Wini Breines, Young, White and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p.44

[68] Ehernreich, p.32

These fissures between postwar capitalism and containment logic also surfaced in anxiety over new technologies and the mass media, which were often framed by the era's gender crises. As chapter one will detail, the mass media was often accused of undermining the potency of American masculinity, whether through its promotion of consumption, which was considered feminising, or by usurping the paternal role by supplying the child with 'adult' knowledge for which the child may not be ready. The stunning development of communication technologies and strategies in the consumer market was met with suspicion relating to the mass media's capacity to coerce, manipulate and brainwash. Following studies of World War Two propaganda, many worried about the media's ability to shape thought and feeling, and the masses' ability to be duped. This anxiety was seldom directed at the more deliberate uses of mass manipulation by the containment narrative's most vocal proponents. The way Harry Truman, Richard Nixon and Joseph McCarthy all used the mass media to mobilise Cold War rhetoric for their own political ends, for example, raised fewer alarms than might have been expected. Nor was the emerging sophistication of advertising's deployment of techniques gleaned from psychology in its promotions of consumer goods a primary source of concern. Rather, alarmed critics focused on television programs, motion pictures and comic books, fixating on these media's impact on the minds of young Americans. Critics of such fare felt that irresponsible media were preying on vulnerable and corruptible young minds to turn a profit, and in the process were inculcating values antithetical to containment's version of 'Americanness'. In particular, the concern was that these media were usurping the paternal role as the authority figure in the household and transmitting irresponsible moral values to the child.[69]

Containment and the Youth Culture

The young played a crucial part in the containment narrative. Counter-subversives repeatedly stressed the necessity of fighting the Cold War to conserve the American system and American values for the children who would inherit the future. White Americans were impelled to conform to the family ideal and move to the suburbs for the health and well-being of their children, and to guard their vulnerable progeny against Communist contagion. The baby boom made youth crucial to the

[69] Spigel, p.60

success of American capitalism. The 5-17 year old population increased by 52,000 during the 1940s, the start of the baby boom, and increased again by 8.3 million during the 1950s. The increased birth rate fostered much optimism about the future. As an ad in New York subways during the 1950s put it: "Your future is great in a growing America. Every day 11,000 babies are born in America. This means new business, new jobs, new opportunities."[70] The young were also vital to America's Cold War public relations effort, underscoring America's desirability. As Lawrence Grossberg pointed out, youth symbolised the promise of American capitalism to the rest of the world:

> The baby boomers became the living promise of the possibility of actually achieving the American Dream. They were to be the best-fed, best-dressed, best-educated generation in the history of the world. They were to be living proof of the success of the American experiment…. [T]he baby boomers were a nation within a nation, a microcosm that stood for the aspirations of the larger nation, a generation that embodied the very meaning of America.[71]

America, then, should have had reason to celebrate its youth to the rest of the world, holding them up as exemplars of the American Dream and as embodiment of the superiority of the American system over Communism.

Yet, as this study will explore, during the pervasive juvenile delinquency hysteria of the 1950s youth was represented not as symbols of America's promising future but as harbingers of its probable decline. Many expected the baby boom generation to produce not economic growth but social chaos given that domineering wives and enfeebled husbands were seen to be warping 'normal' gender roles. According to James Gilbert, juvenile delinquency hysteria peaked from 1953 to 1958, where coverage devoted to diagnosing juvenile delinquency saturated the media, and localised law enforcement agencies explored initiatives to combat the delinquency epidemic. As Gilbert points out, though, this anxiety over delinquency was not supported by evidence.[72]

As we will see in the first chapter, there was no explosion of youth crime in the mid-1950s. Rather, we can attribute the juvenile delinquency hysteria in large part

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[70] Lawrence Grossberg, We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Popular Culture (New York: Routledge, 1992), p.172

[71] Ibid., p.174

[72] James Gilbert, A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.14

to the containment narrative. Adult authorities, the media and concerned parents constructed the emerging youth culture according to the dominant discourse of the era, containment, and interpreted adolescents' difference from the hegemonic order as a sign of deviance, even criminality.

Moreover, many of the contradictions endemic to containment fuelled anxiety surrounding the state of the nation's youth. In particular, gender crises inflamed juvenile delinquency hysteria. While the man in the grey flannel suit was crucial to America's postwar economic strength, his diminishing patriarchal authority stoked fears that his sons would inhabit deviant forms of masculinity that would manifest in delinquency. Moreover, this deviance, it was feared, would be exacerbated by overbearing wives and mothers; as consumers, these women were pivotal to America's economic growth yet their dominance in the home threatened to emasculate their husbands and sons. Hence the contradictions of Cold War gender roles were frequently displaced onto anxieties about how 'deviant' parenting and sex role confusion would poison the nation's youth.

Suspicion and anxiety also centred on the spread of mass media forms. America's mastery of the mass media significantly aided its Cold War public relations campaign and the media was instrumental in cultivating markets for American products. Yet, allegedly, the media also incited juvenile delinquency by usurping paternal authority within the nuclear family. Such fears culminated in the mid-1950s during the Senate's investigations into accusations that the media caused juvenile delinquency.

Furthermore, another contradiction surrounded the atomic bomb; as a weapon of mass destruction, it was the cause of America's global dominance but also a source, after the Soviets acquired a nuclear arsenal in 1949, of tremendous dread. The bomb fuelled fears that 1950s youth, as the first generation to grow up under the shadow of nuclear apocalypse, would suffer existential collapse and revert to acts of wanton destruction.

While juvenile delinquency hysteria tended to polarise youth as 'good kids' or unredeemable psychopaths, the category of 'youth' was more complex. 'Youth' was riven with many axes of social difference and therefore it is problematic to conceive of a stable, unified 'youth culture'. Gender, race, class, geographic location and other more intangible factors differentiated young people's experiences of their 'youth' during the 1950s. However, to an unprecedented degree, 1950s youths recognised

themselves as a group and experienced a shared sense – however imprecise and disparate – of a generation gap from their parents. In part, this was due to shared unprecedented childhood experiences, such as being the first generation to both grow up under the shadow of nuclear apocalypse and be born, unlike their parents, to affluence. The young's sense of themselves as 'youth' and as 'teenagers' was also due, in large measure, to their interpellation as such by a range of social experts during the 1950s. Sociologists, psychologists, marketers, pundits and law enforcers were involved in inventing the 'teenager' in the 1950s, contributing to the conception of a separate psychological and developmental state from child and adult.

It was youngsters themselves, however, who forged the most significant bonds of generational kinship, primarily by carving out autonomous cultural spaces. By no means was the youth culture a systematic, politically and culturally cohesive social formation; rather, socially diverse adolescents gravitated to certain media forms, cultural rituals and commercial practices specific to youth for equally diverse reasons. Young people's access to such spaces and activities was dependent, in varying degrees, upon locality, race, gender, age (early or late teen, for instance), class and mobility. Thus, those with the greatest access to cultural spaces exclusive or vital to the youth culture tended to be white, middle class late teenage males living in urban areas or suburban areas close to cities (especially cities with vibrant black populations). Other groups' access was limited by their degree of marginality from this norm. By analysing the ways youth engaged with and were engaged by these spaces, rituals and practices, we can highlight the intersections and diversions made among members of the 1950s youth culture.

During the Senate hearings on mass media's incitement of juvenile delinquency, as chapter one will discuss, expert testimony tended to construct young people as inert victims of the media's manipulations. But 1950s adolescents were not such pliant, passive, manipulable dupes. In fact, youth actively rebelled against containment's conservatism, utilising the spaces of America's expanding economy to explore alternative cultures and identities. By gravitating to sectors of the population like black and white working class subcultures that were omitted from representations of the harmonious national 'consensus', youth culture did indeed threaten the integrity of the containment narrative.

However, the 'rebellion' of the youth culture was to a large extent circumscribed by containment. Because containment severely limited permissible

modes of dissent, rebellion – or at least "the desire to produce change," as David Savran puts it – had to be "channelled in non-political – or even anti-political – directions. Culture replaced the political arena as the primary site of struggle."[73] Indeed, the rebellion of the youth culture was not explicitly political in the traditional sense – unlike the youth culture of the late 1960s, for example, 1950s teenagers did not organise collective protests, marches and groups that espoused manifestos – but the rituals and practices in which youth engaged clearly had significant political implications. While some young people joined the nascent civil rights movement at this time, this explicit political activism was not characteristic of 1950s youth culture.

Nevertheless, youth's attempts to loosen the constraints of containment through popular culture were tied to the limited ambition of achieving cultural autonomy. That is, the young's 'rebellion' entailed carving out cultural space over which they would have at least nominal control, where teenagers could partake of activities, engage in rituals and consume products that separated them from adults. Through style and music especially, young whites appropriated the culture of the racial other, not necessarily to indicate their progressive racial politics, but rather to delineate adolescents from the parent culture that excised blacks from representations of the national consensus. Ultimately, containment often resurfaced as adult authorities attempted, with varying levels of success, to use its rhetoric as a tool to cleave the youth culture along lines of class and race, ironically resuscitating discourses of social difference that the containment narrative worked to suppress.

Examining Youth Culture Rebellion

The ensuing chapters elucidate the dynamics of youth's problematic cultural rebellion. Chapter one explores the discursive construction of 'youth' in the 1950s, focusing primarily on the era's preoccupation with juvenile delinquency. The discourse of juvenile delinquency, I will argue, ultimately provided stimulus to youth cultural rebellion by imbuing the cultural demon of the 'juvenile delinquent' with a potency to threaten and upset adult culture. This was an image that young people often found seductive and inspirational in their quest to forge a distinctive youth culture that was opposed to adult culture.

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[73] David Savran, Taking it Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism and Contemporary American Culture (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), p.60-1

The second chapter will examine teenagers' stylistic subversion. Inspired by white working class and black subcultures, teenagers, through their clothing, speech and poses, rebelled against the hegemonic masculine icon of the man in the grey flannel suit. As iconic youth films like The Wild One suggest, male adolescents' rebellious style tended to index the era's gender confusion rather than construct a more coherent, viable and virile alternative form of masculinity. Conflating counter-hegemonic style with criminality, adult authorities identified style as intrinsic to the battle against juvenile delinquency. Applying containment logic, adults moved to combat stylistic subversion by quarantining 'infectious' (delinquent) black and white working class youths from 'healthy' (non-delinquent) middle class youths. That the young, mostly middle class and white, were at times complicit in this containment demonstrates the fissures that split the youth culture.

Chapter three will stress that, contrary to the Senate Subcommittee's efforts to combat juvenile delinquency by censoring mass media (see chapter one), meaning was not so easily contained. The Film Production Code, which operated to contain the political, sexual and criminal content of films since the 1930s, became by the 1950s a means by which Cold Warriors attempted to force films to adhere to the containment narrative. Yet, the Code's central premise – that the film dictated meaning to the audience – was flawed. The popularity among youth of films that depicted juvenile delinquency and the emerging youth culture demonstrated the limitations of the Code to contain meanings. Belying the assumptions of the Senate Subcommittee that youth audiences were vulnerable, passive and pliable, youths read these films actively, choosing to identify with and lionise delinquents in defiance of the Code which mandated that films should not "throw sympathy with the criminal as against the law."[74] Despite these films' obligatory punishment of juvenile delinquents in compliance with the Code, adolescents revelled in delinquents' ability to discomfit and evade (if only temporarily) adult authorities.

As chapter three will discuss, in the latter half of the 1950s, youth increasingly appropriated drive-in movie theatres, which became vital spaces for staging some of the texts, rituals and practices that bound the youth culture together. As an outgrowth of suburbanisation and the economic boom that led to an explosion in car ownership, the drive-in originally catered to parents of young children and other groups

[74] Thomas Doherty, Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality and Insurrection in American Cinema 1930-34 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p.351

marginalised by demure indoor urban theatres. Teenagers appropriated the drive-in as a venue to congregate away from adult supervision, to flaunt their customised cars, and to engage in sexual activity in privacy. While the drive-in theatre was arguably more attractive to adolescents than any specific film that played there, the films themselves were also important. In particular, films that independent production companies pitched to the drive-in youth market highlight the contours of the divide that increasingly separated Cold War era youth from their elders. Juvenile delinquent and 'weirdie' films (hybrids of horror and science fiction genres) in particular demonstrated the young's celebration of their 'otherness' to mainstream adult America. That youths lionised the juvenile delinquent and the weirdie's monster (who, if not always explicitly a teenager, was at least an outsider) showed young people's pleasure in demarcating their own cultural preferences and in their ability to upset and shock adults, and how generational antagonism underscored the young's difference from adult culture.

Not only did the drive-in provide a communal space for youths to congregate and engage in youth-specific cultural rituals, but the 'distracted' viewing environment of the drive-in also crucially influenced youth spectators' readings of these films. Unlike modes of spectatorship traditionally associated with 'classical Hollywood cinema', the drive-in tended to distract spectators' attention away from the screen, discouraging spectators' immersion in the screen image and narrative. I will argue that this "distracted spectatorship" encouraged youthful audiences to engage in episodic reading strategies that worked to subvert youth films' Code-compliant endings. That is, the drive-in environment encouraged teenagers to view films in selected episodes rather than as complete narratives, thwarting the Code's efforts to contain meaning within the narrative. The advertising for these films foregrounded youth cultural ritual – like drag races, knife fights and rock n roll. Moreover, they encouraged youths to focus on these moments rather than the inevitable Code-compliant ending that punished delinquents' indiscretions.

Adults' condemnation of youth's patronage of drive-ins also highlights the ambivalence with which mainstream American society regarded the youth culture. The baby boom generation was pivotal to the nation's mythology, constantly feted by youth-specific organisations, educational institutions and consumer markets as an exalted segment of the population who were crucial to America's future prosperity. Yet, ironically, teenagers were vilified for their attempts to establish a unique,

distinctive generational identity and cultural autonomy to which they were told that they were entitled. For adults who wished to contain youth culture, the problem was that the young asserted their distinctive collective identity by appropriating marginal cultural products and spaces over which the hegemonic cultural bloc had little control. Although young people's enthusiastic participation in the consumer market did indeed stimulate the economy, teenagers' appropriation of products like clothes inspired by white working class and black subcultures, drive-in movies and black rhythm and blues music signified their rejection of hegemonic values and threatened to undermine the cultural and economic dominance of the hegemonic bloc.

Sexuality was a tool by which women and blacks were politically repressed in Cold War America. The era's Victorian sexual values engendered in young women a fear of losing one's virginity before marriage, for sexual purity was a woman's only sexual currency in the courtship economy. Dominant representations of femininity medicalised women's sexual promiscuity, linking it to mental illness, contagion and the spread of disease. Rhetorically linked to Communist contagion, female sexual empowerment and assertiveness threatened national security. White fears of miscegenation, embodied in the mythological black beast rapist, legitimated Jim Crow in the South and less explicit forms of segregation in the North.

Some adults feared that rock n roll, as the most obvious manifestation of youth culture, betokened a revolution in both interracial contact and sexual behaviour that could ultimately lead to a political revolution. However, these adults misapprehended the music's role in the formation of the youth culture. Ultimately, rock n roll was less about enfranchising blacks or cross-racial solidarity than it was about predominantly white youth using black culture as a conduit to exercise their cultural autonomy.

Examining rock n roll, chapters four and five illuminate the problems inherent to youth's appropriation of marginalised cultures to assert their distinctiveness and autonomy. Although teenagers' consumption of rock n roll challenged the constraints of this conservative era, the racial politics of rock n roll problematise interpretations that see youth culture as an unambiguously progressive force in Cold War America. On the one hand, youth's consumption of rock n roll indicated a radical refiguring of race in Cold War America. Young whites gravitated primarily towards black cultural forms that had been excised from the national containment narrative and made invisible by postwar representations of America. In this way, the youth culture challenged containment culture. Yet, middle class youth's romanticisation of the

racial and class other, for instance, reveals that the racial and class ideologies of adult America in the 1950s were also present, if expressed and negotiated in radically different ways, within youth culture.

Chapter four will examine this from the perspective of black performers and look at the obstacles rock n roll stars like Chuck Berry and Little Richard faced in gaining popularity among white audiences. In doing so, it revises arguments, like those of George Lipsitz, that celebrate rock n roll as a force for integration during a racist era.[75] I suggest that in fact much of black rock n rollers' artistry in the 1950s lay not with defying but rather with negotiating and often enacting racist stereotypes deeply embedded within white dominated popular culture. In particular, negotiating the fear of black male sexuality, so pervasive in white society, crucially influenced black rock n rollers' performances.

Chapter five interrogates racial crossing and cross-racial desire. This will encompass the 1950s phenomenon of white men's coveting of black masculinity – from the imitative, like Elvis Presley, to the tributary, like Norman Mailer and Jack Kerouac – and white girls' sexual yearning for dangerous 'otherness', particularly in rock n roll singers. This chapter seeks to account for the motivations inherent to this desire to cross over the "colour" line, to embody the racial other and to escape the confines of one's own whiteness. By harbouring cross-racial desire and attempting racial crossing, the young (or white middle class youths, anyway) were making a veiled protest against the constraints imposed by the containment narrative – that circumscribed white America specifically – by rejecting their whiteness and its concomitant privileges and responsibilities. In sum, I suggest that this crossing is youths' very inventive, if somewhat clumsy and inherently problematic, form of protest against the stifling conservatism of containment America.

By examining the 1950s youth culture in such a way, this thesis will seek to fill a void in studies of this subject. While James Gilbert's valuable study of juvenile delinquency hysteria effectively situates discourse about youth in the context of the Cold War, it fails to attribute agency to youths themselves; rather, 'youth' is simply a discursive construction of hysterical adult authorities. Similarly, Thomas Doherty's work on the genre he calls 'teenpics' that emerged in the 1950s conceives youth

[75] See, for example, George Lipsitz, "Land of a Thousand Dances: Youth, Minorities, and the Rise of Rock and Roll" in Lary May (ed.), Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) and George Lipsitz, "'Against the Wind': The Class Composition of Rock and Roll Music" in Knowledge and Society, vol.5 (1984)

culture as predominantly the construction of clever marketing gimmicks and postwar film industry peculiarities.[76] By contrast, I argue that while adult authorities and marketers were often pivotal (albeit unintentionally in some cases) in inculcating a sense of generational communality among youths – authorities through their draconian measures to combat delinquency and marketers through campaigns to create demand for teen products – young people nonetheless played an active role in negotiating the stereotypes through which adults viewed them. Moreover, a significant component of forging generational alliance came when youths ridiculed and parodied the phantoms that adults had created about young people, as the popularity of such drive-in fare as I Was A Teenage Werewolf and Teenagers From Outer Space attests.

Similarly, studies of rock n roll have seldom considered the context of the Cold War. When they have, it has generally been to contrast rock n roll's liberation of body and soul to the era's stifling of creativity, painting rock n roll as an aberration to the Cold War's conservatism and racial politics. However, as I will argue, the emergence of rock n roll was less an aberration that was antithetical to the general direction of Cold War society than a mutated outgrowth of its central tenets. Other studies, such as Todd Gitlin's[77], have read rock n roll as tantamount to a prototype for youth's widespread involvement in the civil rights movement during the 1960s. I argue that black rock n rollers' necessary embodiment of stereotypes that civil rights activists roundly condemned, as well as white rock n rollers' reliance on the maintenance of lines of segregation to license their fantasies of racial transfiguration, problematise such interpretations.

Chapter six will argue that there was a marked shift in youth culture around the turn of the decade. By the early 1960s, youth culture no longer evoked the dangerous otherness with which it was synonymous in the late 1950s. A number of factors motivated this shift, including an attitudinal change toward 'youth' among adult America. In 1960 John F. Kennedy highlighted this change when he deliberately used the concept of 'youth' to invigorate his presidential campaign. The election of Kennedy coincided with and contributed to a general softening of attitudes toward the young, as the youth culture no longer seemed so shockingly new to most adults.

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[76] Thomas Doherty, Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988)

[77] Gitlin, p.37-44

Indeed, because of a complex of social and economic forces in the larger culture, the most important shift occurred within youth culture itself. Even though statistics suggest a rise in teenage misbehaviour and criminality at this time, ironically representations of youth culture, principally in music and movies, became increasingly tame. As I will argue, the restructuring of the music industry at the end of the 1950s was crucial to this transformation in youth culture. Rock n roll was a highly controversial cultural form during the 1950s, primarily for its combination of generational rebellion, blackness and sexuality in music that emanated from outside the music establishment. Concerned adult authorities, segregationists, moral crusaders and representatives of major record labels led the backlash against, first, rhythm and blues and then, after 1955, rock n roll, prodding the government to investigate the allegedly pernicious emergence of this music.

The cumulative effect of congressional investigations into the conduct of music publishers, radio stations and disc jockeys shifted control of the music industry back to the major labels and in the process purged rock n roll of its most explosive elements, namely blackness and sexuality. Abandoning its original intention to destroy rock n roll now that it had regained financial dominance, the music establishment instead conceded to rock n roll a central role in the industry, primarily because of the new music's tremendous profitability.

Independent film companies that had furnished youth culture with representations of rebellious delinquents in the 1950s followed the music industry's lead and transformed dominant representations of teenagers in films. The bronzed and hygienic 'clean teen' effectively usurped the delinquent as the pre-eminent paragon of the youth culture, and the delinquent's leather jacket and jeans uniform now signified his lack of fashion sense rather than his rebelliousness.

This transformation ultimately underscores how reliant youth culture was on the consumer market. While the youth culture was not merely an outgrowth of marketing and product placement, it did fuse around consumer products not of its own making, even though its inventive consumption inevitably shaped these products. By appropriating marginal cultural spaces that white mainstream adult culture ignored, these youngsters formed a successful tacit alliance with marginalised elements of the film and music industries that serviced youth with products that buttressed youth's sense of cultural independence and autonomy. But because these independent companies occupied positions of marginality in their industries, they were subject to

the machinations of dominant industry players. The music industry's major labels, with the help of Congress, squeezed out independent competitors and were able to reshape youth cultural product. This gravely affected the texts that the youth culture produced and consumed, bringing these texts closer to the dominant value system of adult culture. While the music establishment removed or sublimated the explosive elements of blackness and sexuality in rock n roll, crucially it realised that youthful consumers would no longer consume the same products as adults. The performers who emerged after the music industry was restructured were themselves young and their implied audience too was young, ultimately confirming the success of the 1950s youth culture in securing its own space in American consumer culture.

The reconfiguration of the youth culture at the beginning of the 1960s attests to how 'contained' was 1950s youth cultural 'rebellion'. While teachers, law enforcers and other adult authorities worried that the emergence of the youth culture betokened an impending wave of anarchic delinquency, the youth culture's 'rebellion' was far less incendiary. Moreover, the young's consumption of rock n roll, instead of radically reinventing American race relations as many segregationists feared, reinforced the racial ideologies of the parent culture at least as often as it promised cultural miscegenation for young blacks and whites. Yet, for all its ambiguities, 1950s youth culture managed often to question the weaknesses, fissures and inadequacies of the containment narrative at a time when explicit dissent was prohibited. While it seldom provided coherent answers to the questions it posed, the youth culture at least posed questions with a sceptical and menacing sneer that, for a time, made adult America quake in its loafers.

Chapter 1

Boys with Knives:
Containment Culture and the Construction of Juvenile Delinquency

"The youth of the world today is touched with madness, literally sick with an aberrant condition of mind formerly confined to a few distressed souls but now epidemic over the earth." – Robert Lindner (1954)[1]

A decade before the height of juvenile delinquency hysteria in the mid-1950s, many Americans anticipated an oncoming wave of youth criminality. The newsreel "Youth in Crisis," produced in 1943 as part of the March of Time series reflected widespread fears during the 1940s that an uncontrollable juvenile delinquency epidemic was imminent. Blaming wartime America's breakdown of paternal authority, familial stability and societal morality for causing anarchic behaviour among the nation's youth, the film details unsupervised "door-key kids" who gravitate toward unwholesome activities, like smoking marijuana on street corners, stealing cars for joy rides and committing wanton acts of underage sex, often with servicemen. Statistics and graphs used in the film paint an alarming picture: "Offenses Against Common Decency By Girls Under 21" increased by 89% in 1943; FBI figures from January to July 1943 showed that 18.8% of prostitution crimes, 32.2% of rapes and 58.5% of burglaries were committed by criminals under the age of 21. One graph depicting the increasing arrest rate of girls under 21 – showing a rise from under 10,000 in 1941 to almost 20,000 in 1943 – underscores its point visually; a small silhouette of a feminine figure represents 1941, a larger silhouette represents 1942, and a towering, Amazonian figure dominates the screen to represent 1943 as the soundtrack thunders menacingly. The film implies that statistics for 1944 will be even worse, referring to psychiatrists' predictions that future generations will grow up mentally scarred because of the instability of war. The voiceover accompanying shots

[1] J. Ronald Oakley, God's Country: America in the Fifties (New York: Dembner Books, 1986), p.270

of children play-shooting each other and listening to crime radio dramas warns us that youngsters are "quick to absorb the new spirit of violence and recklessness."[2]

Many experts reiterated the point of the film that America should expect an epidemic of delinquency as these psychologically damaged and poorly raised children entered adolescence. Speaking with typical alarmism, J. Edgar Hoover during the 1940s constantly repeated the FBI's worrying statistics predicting an impending crime wave sparked by the young: "Like the sulphurous lava which boils beneath the slumbering volcano – such is the status of crime in America today."[3] In 1943, Dr. Clinton Howard, of the International Reform Federation, urged that Hoover's message "should be repeated again and again until the entire Nation realizes that we are in danger of becoming a nation of criminals within the next generation."[4] Hoover continued this rhetoric into the early 1950s, issuing a dire warning as the baby boomers reached adolescence in 1953: "The first wave in this flood tide of new citizens born between 1940 and 1950 has just this year reached the 'teen-age', the period in which some of them will inevitably incline toward juvenile delinquency and, later, a full-fledged criminal career."[5]

A survey of the media coverage surrounding juvenile delinquency in the mid-1950s gives the impression that Hoover's fears were realised. Between 1953 and 1958, the number of articles on juvenile delinquency spiked, as did the public's concern about juvenile delinquency.[6] Scores of public education films produced for schoolroom and community group consumption explored the prevailing theories surrounding the 'epidemic'. So serious was the problem that the Senate investigated the causes of delinquency in a series of hearings that lasted more than a decade. The American Bar Association pursued its own investigations into delinquency. Prominent publications like Saturday Evening Post, Life and New York Times frequently depicted youth as marauding criminals. A 1957 Newsweek article entitled "Why the

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[2] This film, misidentified as "The Birth of Juvenile Delinquency," is compiled on the video Teenage Confidential: Government Scare Films of the '40s and '50s (dir. Johnny Legend, Rhino Home Video, 1987)

[3] James Gilbert, A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.28

[4] Ibid., p.29

[5] Ibid., p.72

[6] According to Readers Guide and Gallup Polls, respectively. Ibid., p.63-4

Young Kill: Prowling the Juvenile Jungles of the Big Cities" is emblematic. Referring to the city, it states: "Here occur most of the serious crimes of murder, rape, robbery, theft, and vandalism" committed by gangs of delinquent male youths who had turned cities into "'juvenile jungles' where prudent men walk cautiously after nightfall'."[7]

Yet, belying this inflammatory reaction to the perceived delinquency epidemic was the fact that crime among youth did not significantly rise during the 1950s. As James Gilbert shrewdly deduces in his study, A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s, by no objective measurement can a significant rise in youth criminality during the 1950s be detected. In fact, statistics suggest that during the 1950s rates of delinquency were lower than they were at either the beginning or the end of World War Two. Moreover, it was not until 1960, when juvenile delinquency hysteria had subsided, that delinquency rates began to rise alarmingly. However, as chapter six will explain, by this time very little public attention was directed at this sharp rise.[8]

The comparatively low rates of juvenile delinquency during the 1950s are remarkable in light of the widening range of "status crimes" for which youngsters were arrested during the 1950s. That is, because authorities had anticipated a youth crime wave since the 1940s, they policed young people's behaviour especially harshly. According to Gilbert, acts that constitute "hard core criminality" – which includes acts that society traditionally considers criminal in any age group, such as rape, murder, assault, theft and the destruction of property – remain relatively stable in terms of their definition and level of punishment. "Status crimes," on the other hand, are low-grade offences that are deemed criminal because of the age, race or gender of the perpetrator; juvenile criminality, for example, includes underage drinking, underage sex, breaking of curfew and driving a vehicle without a license. Moreover, the definition of status crimes tends to shift according to historical circumstances; an act defined as a status crime in one era does not necessarily constitute a status crime in another. Gilbert argues that because authorities anticipated a juvenile crime wave as a corollary of the baby boom, the definition of status crimes during the 1950s was especially draconian. Many localities established authorities to

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[7] Steve Cohan, Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p.115

[8] Gilbert, p.14, 71

police youth behaviour exclusively and exert harsh laws designed to punish delinquent activities.[9] Thus, acts defined as 'juvenile delinquent' often (according to locality) included 'loitering' with fellow young people, riding one's bicycle on the footpath and the broadly defined "incorrigible behaviour," artificially inflating statistics regarding youth criminality.[10]

Despite this inflation, statistics do not suggest a significant rise in youthful transgression, certainly not enough to warrant adults' hysterical response to the spectre of juvenile delinquency. There was no significant rise in hard-core criminality, and even when one considers the increased types of status crimes in the 1950s, the statistics do not suggest an engulfing wave of youth criminality. Gilbert emphasises the skewed and sketchy character of statistics on youth criminals in the 1950s. He shows that some figures, such as those the Children's Bureau 1953 publication Facts About Juvenile Delinquency cited, merely speculated about juvenile delinquency. This report dubiously reasoned that, because minors under the age of eighteen committed 24 percent of all auto thefts, 19 percent of all burglaries and 7 percent of all rapes, the postwar population boom - which, it estimated, would soon produce 42 percent more young people aged between ten and seventeen – would spawn huge numbers of juvenile delinquents.[11]

Not just the product of statistical anomaly or adults' paranoid delusions, the preoccupation with juvenile delinquency was motivated, at least in part, by actual and dramatic changes in the character of youth in the 1950s. In the first half of the 1950s, a national youth culture began to emerge that perceived a generational fissure between adults and teenagers. A consumer market appealing to teenagers' sense of difference to adult tastes and mores, aided by a booming economy providing young people with increased mobility and greater expendable income, was crucial to the rise of the youth

[9] Ibid., p.69; William Graebner suggests that only after Buffalo declared a war on juvenile delinquency in 1952 did delinquency rates escalate. In fact, Graebner estimates that Buffalo's juvenile crime rate reached an all-time low in 1952, and began to increase substantially during 1953 and continued rising sharply thereafter. This indicates that Buffalo's youth crime rate escalated much earlier than the rest of the country according to Gilbert's figures, but it is consistent with Gilbert's assertion that anticipation of a wave of juvenile delinquency preceded a rise in delinquency rates, suggesting that draconian policing was probably the major cause of high rates of youth crime by 1960. William Graebner, "The 'Containment' of Juvenile Delinquency: Social Engineering and American Youth Culture in the Postwar Era" in American Studies, vol.27, Spring 1986: 81

[10] Gilbert, p.70

[11] Ibid., p.67

culture. Even more important in shaping the specific contours of youth culture were the perceived failures of adult culture. The desire among 1950s youth to reject the parent culture was in part fuelled by the psychological terror that the atom bomb wreaked. As I will outline below, adults' attempts to explain the bomb to children and calm their fears only served to highlight the contradictions of nuclear policy and heighten their sense of incredulity toward, and urge to rebel against, adult authority. To many adults, these rebellious tendencies were evidence of a rising tide of juvenile delinquency.

Of particular concern to adults, youth culture fused around a rejection of middle class adult hegemony and a celebration of marginalised cultures, specifically black and white working class cultures. Because 1950s youth culture celebrated and replicated the behaviours, attitudes and cultural tastes of youth from these communities, adults, as Gilbert notes, conflated 'juvenile delinquency' and 'youth culture', or at least perceived a causal relationship between the two.[12] To parents, mere participation in the youth culture indicated present or future juvenile delinquency.

During the 1950s, juvenile delinquency was constructed through the pervasive cultural framework of containment, which, at least in part, caused this conflation of juvenile delinquency with youth culture. As we have seen, the containment narrative established rigid boundaries demarcating the 'normal' – that is, everything that buttressed the notion that America was a happy, harmonious, idyllic society – from the 'deviant' – everything that threatened this notion. Deviance was always constructed as a threat that emanated from outside 'normal' American society and that was ultimately aiding the Soviet Union; if the threat was not directly Communist-inspired, it was at least benefiting the Communist cause by impugning America's harmoniousness and thus its international reputation. Under this logic, attitude and behaviour on the part of the emerging youth culture that differed from or resisted mainstream values was deemed 'deviant' and consigned to the category of delinquency.

Concerned parents, teachers and various adult authorities regularly turned to the predominant metaphors and tropes of the containment narrative to explain and make sense of juvenile delinquency. In doing so, juvenile delinquency was

[12] Ibid., p.18

discursively associated with the era's primary cultural demon, Communism. Like Communism, juvenile delinquency was rhetorically linked to contagion and disease, which worked to displace the social critique inherent in pre-1950s theories about juvenile delinquency. That is, while traditional theories of delinquency stressed social disharmony and anomie as prime causal factors, under containment such implicit critiques of American society were displaced; rather than indicating social failure, delinquency was instead a matter of individual disease and illness that emanated from outside America's otherwise healthy social body.

Also like Communism, during the 1950s juvenile delinquency hysteria was mobilised to legitimate key tenets of the containment narrative. By blaming 'matriarchal'[13] families for causing delinquency, for instance, this hysteria worked in the interests of patriarchal authority by mandating, in response to the era's crisis of masculinity, the dominance of the paternal figure within the nuclear family. Yet, juvenile delinquency hysteria also betrayed some of the contradictions and fissures of the containment narrative. While the containment narrative posited the notion that America was a harmonious 'classless' society, for example, representations of juvenile delinquency in public education films and newspaper articles nonetheless frequently, albeit obliquely, depicted class as a central component of delinquency. Such representations attempted to redefine traditional theorisations of juvenile delinquency according to the logic of the containment narrative. Overwhelmingly, these representations blamed 'abnormal' families and 'irresponsible' media for usurping paternal authority and causing the perceived explosion in delinquency.

Theorising Juvenile Delinquency

In 1904, psychologist G. Stanley Hall laid the theoretical ground for juvenile delinquency by attaching a name to the period of life that began with puberty and ended with adulthood: adolescence. In doing this, theorists reconfigured what had previously been collapsed into broad and vague categories like "childhood," "youth" or "young adulthood," conceiving adolescence as a unique and discrete developmental stage.[14] Hall described this period of life as tumultuous and emotional, but, with adult guidance, protection and supervision, capable of progressing onto

[13] Where the mother is either the sole parent or the dominant parent.

[14] Doherty, p.42

successful adulthood. Thus Hall's concept cemented adults' right to exercise control over this phase of life. Hall's theories spread quickly and gained widespread cultural support, largely because they reflected and added legitimacy to social changes already occurring. Hall's conception of adolescence as a discrete and protected category legitimated a range of cultural phenomena, including child labour laws, age restrictions on sex, alcohol and later driving, youth clubs, juvenile courts and reform schools.[15] From this concept emerged the criminological discourse of juvenile delinquency.

Early theorisations of juvenile delinquency emphasised its environmental causes. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, delinquency was thought to sprout from malignant urban environs: inner city slums and ghettos, ethnic poor and working class neighbourhoods. Clifford Shaw's study of youth in Chicago in the 1920s was probably the most influential early work on juvenile delinquency. Shaw identified "disorganized" urban communities as hotbeds of juvenile delinquency. In particular, Shaw emphasised the urban environment's adverse effects upon new immigrant populations. In condemning the "social disorganization" of immigrant communities, he asserted: "This breakdown of community control is accelerated by the social and personal disorganization among the immigrant groups who are forced to make their adjustment to a new culture." For Shaw, delinquency was inextricably woven into the process of immigration and Americanisation.[16]

Shaw's contemporaries cited parental absence and structural failures like poverty as additional causes of delinquency.[17] These assumptions about the origins of juvenile delinquency became increasingly prevalent during the social dislocation of the Depression, which produced a spike in youth crime. One newsreel of the early 1940s, which documented the rising number of "boys" in prison, reflected the dominant assumption that impoverished working class environments bred young criminals. Over images of scruffy, unkempt children squatting amid the rubble of dilapidating buildings, the voiceover asserts: "Many of these boys were born in squalid neighbourhoods where grimy factories crowd ramshackle homes – regions

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[15] Victoria Getis, "Experts and Juvenile Delinquency, 1900-1935" in Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard, Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998), p.21-3

[16] Gilbert, p.128-9

[17] Getis, p.27-30

known simply as 'the other side of the railroad tracks' – places where crime is cradled."[18] Before the war, then, the underlying assumption was that white middle class families that contained both parents and lived in a non-poverty-stricken neighbourhood were immune from juvenile delinquency. As the 1943 "Youth in Crisis" newsreel put it, "the well-adjusted home, built upon a foundation of affection and understanding, is still the surest bulwark for safe-guarding the nation's youth."[19]

According to traditional definitions of juvenile delinquency, adherence to the postwar suburban family ideal should have guaranteed immunity from juvenile delinquency. Conforming to 'normal' gender roles and buying into the universal 'middle class' while living in affluent suburban neighbourhoods should have girded the family against the prevalent environmental causes of juvenile delinquency. But, as we have seen, even though juvenile delinquency did not significantly rise in the 1950s, youth crime still occurred. Of most concern to adult authorities that posited affluence as the best protection against juvenile delinquency, crime was increasingly perpetrated by teenagers from white middle class suburban families. More importantly, these adolescents were drawn in increasing numbers throughout the 1950s to the youth culture that, to adults, denoted juvenile delinquency.

This forced many social theorists to revise their frameworks for analysing juvenile delinquency. Environmental models for explaining delinquency persisted, as representations of the city as a 'juvenile jungle' suggested, but were skewed according to the logic of containment. Previous environmental models had stressed "social disorganization" as a prime cause of juvenile delinquency. Under containment, such admission of structural failures in the social order was not permissible. Thus delinquency models shifted, emphasising individual maladjustment, deviance and disease. In particular, failure to conform to the family ideal was most often cited as the primary cause of delinquency. Leading theorists Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck typified this tendency to blame dysfunctional families rather than impoverished environments when they concluded in their 1950 study, Unraveling Juvenile

[18] Ibid., p.28

[19] Teenage Confidential: Government Scare Films of the '40s and '50s. Dir. Johnny Legend. Videocassette. Rhino Home Video, 1987.

Delinquency, that "the basic causes of delinquency appear to be in faulty child-parent relationships during the first 6 or 8 years of the child's life."[20]

Although familial breakdown was frequently cited as a leading cause of delinquency during the war, it was most often paired with an impoverished economic environment. Poverty disrupted the normal family structure by forcing mothers into work, which left their children without adequate supervision. Moreover, men were absent from the home during the war, leaving women to be breadwinners and heads of the household. Theorists of juvenile delinquency commonly stressed that this caused much distress both to the mother who struggled to adapt to these 'unnatural' social roles and to the child whose sense of gender normality was severely undermined by matriarchal rule. Juvenile delinquency inevitably ensued from the child's gender confusion.

In the postwar era, familial failure was no longer attributed to social factors like war and poverty. Rather, according to the logic of containment, postwar consensus society offered the perfect circumstances for the fulfilment of the family ideal. Accordingly, deviance from the family ideal was caused by individual maladjustment and failure. In particular, overbearing housewives and submissive "men in grey flannel suits" were blamed for causing delinquency by refusing to fulfil their proper gender roles. The preponderance of juvenile delinquency hysteria suggested that familial dysfunction might be more prevalent and commonplace than the supposed 'normal' family ideal. At the very least, this hysteria indicated that there was a great deal of anxiety about the ability of American families to attain this ideal.

The differences between two similarly themed public education films, "A Boy in Court" from 1945 and "A Boy with a Knife" from 1956, reflect this shift in delinquency models in the postwar era. "A Boy in Court," produced by the National Probation Association to stress the importance of probation officers in rehabilitating miscreants, tells the story of Johnny Munro, a teenage boy who is brought before the juvenile justice system. After loitering on the street corner with his friends, the bored teenagers find a car with its key in the ignition and go on a joyride. When the car crashes, Johnny's friends escape but Johnny is caught. Brought before a judge, the

[20] Quoted in U. S. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, Television and Juvenile Delinquency, Report of the Committee on the Judiciary, 84th Congress, 1st session, 1956 [hereafter cited as TV and Juvenile Delinquency], p.32

sullen, uncooperative Johnny is placed into the care of beneficent Probation Officer Benton.

Reflecting traditional definitions of delinquency, Johnny's environment – a "world of squalid homes, dirt, confusion" – is blamed for his bad behaviour. Befitting the wartime emphasis on familial breakdown as a primary cause of juvenile delinquency, Johnny's family is also in disarray. His father is dead and "his tired, nagging mother" cannot cope with holding down a cleaning job and raising her children. Benton cures Johnny's delinquency by occupying the vacant paternal role, channelling Johnny's youthful energies into adult-supervised activities like sports, church and model airplane building. Brought before the judge once more, Johnny is now reformed because of the healthy paternal influence of his probation officer and regrets his former delinquency: "Gee, that was stupid, wasn't it?"[21]

"A Boy with a Knife," directed by Laslo Benedek who also directed The Wild One, similarly documents an adult social worker's efforts to reform a juvenile delinquent. Focusing on social worker Bud Williams's efforts to reform disturbed switchblade knife-wielding adolescent Jerry Phillips, the film is more sophisticated and complex in its depiction of juvenile delinquency than "A Boy in Court," but it similarly proposes paternal guidance and authority as the most effective solution to delinquency. Hard-boiled narrator Richard Widmark (star of tough-guy films noir like Night and the City and Pickup on South Street) describes a gang of "rowdy kids, troubled kids heading for trouble, still a year from real crime but, with violence and destruction their only outlet, they're on their way to it." Befitting postwar definitions of delinquency, each of the boys come from a dysfunctional family but neither social class nor poverty is mentioned as a possible cause of their misbehaviour. One kid "has never seen his mother sober," another delinquent's parents are dead, one boy's "father's in prison" and another "gets too much spending money from his people – money, never any of their time." After gaining the gang's trust and engaging them in activities that take them off the street corner, like baseball, hiking and a club house, Bud manages to "straighten out the kids" by acting as their surrogate figure of paternal authority.

However, Jerry proves the hardest to rehabilitate. Jerry is, as Widmark drawls, "rejected by his step-mother, let down by his father – he's the loneliest of them all."

[21] Compiled on the video Teenage Confidential: Government Scare Films of the '40s and '50s

The film makes it clear that Jerry's delinquency is caused by the gender abnormality within his family's home. Nagged by his dominant step-mother who constantly berates him for being "a hoodlum" while his hen-pecked father stays silent, Jerry expresses his anger through his prized knife, first stabbing it into the front door of the family home and later slashing the cushions of his step-mother's sofa. But, as Widmark reminds us, "the knife – always the knife – a poor substitute for understanding, for strength, for love."

Typical of postwar representations of juvenile delinquency, Jerry's step-mother's "nagging" manner and her domination of Jerry's father are seen as crucial factors in producing deviant behaviour. She deliberately obstructs Jerry's attempts to discuss his problems with his father by bullying her husband, forcing Jerry to turn to his gang for support. But Jerry's sensitivity about his gender identity inflames his temper and keeps him alienated from his peers. While playing baseball, fellow gang member Mike taunts Jerry, telling him that he "couldn't make a girl's team the way you play," causing Jerry to draw his knife. Only Bud's intervention prevents Jerry from killing Mike. Later, Mike again teases Jerry about his father, saying "you're chicken, just like your old man," and Jerry again takes to him with his knife. Only when Jerry's father, after consulting with Bud, stands up against his wife on Jerry's behalf after she threatens to send him away, does Jerry relinquish the knife to Bud. In other words, only after gender normality is restored, when Jerry's father dominates his wife, is Jerry's delinquency cured.[22]

"Boy with a Knife" thematically parallels the prestigious Hollywood film, Rebel Without a Cause, produced a year earlier. In it, Jim Stark's (played by James Dean) delinquency is clearly caused by his dysfunctional parents who are, as he exasperatedly shouts at them, "tearing me apart." In particular, the film blames Jim's mother's dominance of his father for causing Jim's delinquency. His wife's nagging has effeminised Jim's father, which is underscored by the frilly apron that he wears over his grey flannel suit. In the absence of paternal authority, Jim suffers, like Jerry, a debilitating crisis of masculine identity. Jim embarks on a series of reckless acts to prove his manhood to the delinquent gang, who taunt him for being "chicken," the film's by-word for unmanliness; these reckless acts culminate in the car race to the edge of the cliff that takes Buzz's life. Jim yearns for gender normality, so that he

[22] "A Boy with a Knife." Dir. Laslo Benedek. Narr. Richard Widmark. Dudley Pictures Corporation, 1956. Available on http://www.archive.org/details/prelinger. Accessed 7/2/06

"could go just one day without having to be all confused." As he tells police chief of the juvenile division Ray, he wishes for his father to restore paternal dominance – hence gender 'normality' – within the family by "knocking Mom cold just once, then maybe she'd be happy." At the film's conclusion, Jim's father gives his wife a threatening look as she begins to harangue him, suggesting that he will help Jim cure his delinquency by dominating his wife.[23] Although, as I argue in chapter three, this 'happy ending' is somewhat hollow, it at least superficially conforms to postwar constructions of juvenile delinquency that stressed the necessity of paternal dominance within the family.

Both Rebel Without a Cause and "Boy With a Knife" differ from earlier depictions of juvenile delinquency in their failure to attribute the causes of juvenile delinquency to poverty. Nonetheless, elements of class marking remain submerged in both films. For instance, both depict the boys in the juvenile gangs sporting working class styles – greasy long hair, t-shirts, motorcycle boots and jeans. In "Boy with a Knife," the gang steal pocket money from better-dressed middle class teenagers dressed in cardigans with neat side-parted hair. In Rebel Without a Cause, Buzz (Corey Allen) and his gang bait Jim for wearing "square" clothes typical of middle class teenagers to school; Buzz only accepts Jim when he turns up to the 'chickie run' dressed in jeans, a t-shirt and a leather jacket, which match the gang's working class threads. The gang's style of speech in "Boy with a Knife," including expressions like "ain't it?" and "jawing it up" (for 'talking together'), is also typical of traditional depictions of inner-city 'ethnic' juvenile delinquents like the Dead End Kids.[24] Although these elements are presumably designed to connect the gang to traditional depictions of delinquency and enhance the 'realism' of the gang, they nevertheless evoke class and ethnicity as causes of delinquency despite the overt denial of their

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[23] Rebel Without a Cause. Dir. Nicholas Ray. Perf. James Dean, Natalie Wood, Sal Mineo, Corey Allen. Warner Brothers, 1955.

[24] The Dead End Kids were a group of young actors who starred in a series of films during the late 1930s and 1940s, including Dead End (1937) and Angels with Dirty Faces (1939). They depicted tough teenaged street kids from impoverished inner-city ethnic neighbourhoods of New York (in another incarnation, they were also known as the Bowery Boys). The plots of their films often detailed these kids' illicit activities (shoplifting, mugging, burglary, vandalism) and the struggle of a benevolent paternal figure (a priest, policeman or concerned citizen) to reform their behaviour. These kids' delinquency was always explicitly linked to their chaotic and anomic neighbourhoods and their ethnicity (as represented by their broad accents, wisecracks and 'ethnic' slang), casting their reformation as a matter of inculcating into them dominant middle class values and 'Americanising' them.

relevance in these films. In doing so, these evocations of class and ethnicity also inadvertently reveal the persistence of these identities in 'classless' American postwar society, thus challenging containment's central premise.

By marking these youth gangs as class and ethnic 'others' through the way that they dress and talk, both of these films register but do not overtly address the escalating conflict between adult authorities and youth culture over style during the 1950s. Young people, including those who considered themselves middle class whites, were increasingly appropriating styles that characterised black and white working classes. As chapter two will detail, the youth culture alarmed adults by embracing clothing styles, hairstyles, styles of speech and even styles of moving and posing appropriated from black and white working class subcultures. Young people's appropriation of these styles implied a rejection of middle class hegemony and, like the ethnic and class marking of youth gangs in "A Boy with a Knife" and Rebel Without a Cause, undermined the notion of America's 'classlessness' that was central to the containment narrative.

The significance of youth's stylistic rebellion was not lost on adult authorities, many of whom declared that style was the front line in the war against juvenile delinquency. For example, in the wake of James Dean's death teenagers in Buffalo paid tribute by wearing t-shirts in the same style as his character Jim Stark wore in Rebel Without a Cause, but dyed black as "an act of mourning and defiance" to the city's zealous policing of suspected juvenile delinquents. Buffalo Mayor Frank Sedita, seeing the t-shirts as a sign of rebellion and an incitement to juvenile delinquency, took the extraordinary step of outlawing the sale of black t-shirts; he also threatened to confiscate any black t-shirts worn within the city limits.[25] As this episode makes clear, anxieties surrounding juvenile delinquency were fuelled both by adults' hypersensitivity to the behaviour young people and by the rebellious tendencies of the emerging youth culture.

The Formation of the Youth Culture

The postwar economic boom was crucial to the rise of this distinctive youth culture. The boom equipped working parents with disposable income from which they could apportion allowances to children. This undoubtedly contributed to teenagers'

[25] Graebner, p.90

burgeoning car ownership throughout the 1950s. By the end of the decade, 44 percent of boys and 19 percent of girls owned or at least possessed their own cars.[26] Although statistics are scarce, anecdotal evidence and extant figures suggest that youth employment grew throughout the 1950s as well. One survey of fourteen to seventeen year olds found that employment among boys rose from 18.6 percent in 1940 to 24.9 by 1950 and 25.8 in 1960. Employment among girls rose from 7.6 percent in 1940 to 14.6 by 1960. More significantly, among those still in school, employment among boys rose from 18.4 percent in 1950 to 23.3 in 1960. Among girls, 8.5 percent both worked and attended school in 1950, and by 1960 this rose to 12.4.[27] What resulted was a significant population of youth who were independently mobile and financially empowered but remained in school. School was the most important institution to cultivate young people's sense of separateness from adults. Remaining in school enabled youths to retain social networks among their teenaged peer groups, and participate in the youth culture, to a far greater extent than if they had entered full-time employment.

In addition to schools, institutions like juvenile hall, juvenile reformatories and youth clubs worked to ratify the notion of youth as a state of being separate from adulthood. Childhood institutions that segregated youths from casual contact with adults and formalised adults' authority over youths developed throughout the century, but, as Beth Bailey argues, it was not until the 1950s that the process of universalising "youth as a discrete and protected category" was "largely complete."[28] Although institutions like high schools generally remained segregated by race and class, in the 1950s more young people in general – and more socially diverse young people – were remaining longer in youth-specific institutions, leading to greater exposure to the collective experience of 'youth'.

The postwar consumer market also worked to universalise the notion of 'youth' identity. Sensing the commercial potential of the massive baby boom population, marketers tentatively pitched products to young consumers in the early

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[26] Gilbert, p.12

[27] Ibid., p.20

[28] Beth Bailey, From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p.10

1950s, such as Davy Crockett coonskin caps and magazines for teenage girls.[29] The success of these early ventures proved the viability of youth as a consumer group. By the mid-1950s marketers were pitching products like pimple cream, hair grease, hula hoops, blue jeans and soft drinks directly to the burgeoning teenaged population. As Jon Savage puts it, the youth consumer market emphasised youths' "acute sense of *difference* from the adult world."[30] Teen pollster and marketing guru Eugene Gilbert pinpointed the ascendancy of peer authority when he urged that in order to cultivate a teen market it was necessary "to sell a product to the leaders in school; what they approve counts for far more than what Mom and Dad approve at home."[31]

Mobility, financial independence, inculcation by youth-oriented institutions and a consumer market targeting young people were integral factors in the formation of the youth culture. Yet, as Eugene Gilbert's comments indicated, what was most crucial was the rejection of parental tastes, values and authority. To reject the cultural tastes and practices of another's culture is a normal and necessary facet of cultivating a separate autonomous culture, but there were imperatives specific to the 1950s that made the desire to renounce adult culture and adult authority all the more urgent.

To an unquantifiable degree, the atomic bomb imperilled the relationship between adults and children. Adults' consistent failure to present the bomb in coherent and credible terms compromised its authority. For example, the notorious 'Duck and Cover' film campaign, presented by an animated turtle named Bert, offered preposterous solutions to nuclear management. Presenting a myriad of everyday situations in which one should expect an atomic bomb to be dropped, Bert advises children to fall to the ground and shield their heads with their arms.[32] A comic of the same name, three million of which were distributed to young people nationwide, suggested the best methods of sheltering from the bomb: "Outdoors, duck behind

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[29] Gilbert, p.15

[30] Jon Savage, "The Enemy Within: Sex, Rock and Identity" in Simon Frith (ed), Facing the Music (New York: Pathenon Books, 1988), p.140

[31] Thomas Doherty, Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), p.53

[32] See The Atomic Café. Dir. Kevin Rafferty. Videocassette. New Video, 1982.

walls and trees. Even in the hollow ground. In a bus or auto, duck down behind or under the seats."[33]

At schools, the duck and cover drills were frequently practiced during civil defence drills. Some school children were allocated military-style dog tags so that they could be identified should their bodies be incinerated in an atomic blast. Surely not lost on these youngsters was an alarming contradiction: if all it took to counteract the effects of an atomic bomb was to cover one's head, why were constant drills and dog tags necessary? To allay perceptive students, some teachers allowed children to believe that their dog tags acted as magic shields against the blast.[34]

Further contradictions surfaced in representations of the "friendly atom." Walt Disney's film Our Friend the Atom was symptomatic, presenting the "Atomic Genie" who is "a smiling, magic servant to all mankind."[35] Operation Atomic Vision, a joint publication of the National Education Association and the Atomic Energy Commission released to high schools in 1948, similarly gushed that because of atomic energy: "Food will be cheap and abundant…. No one will need to work long hours. There will be much leisure and a network of large recreational areas will cover the country, if not the world."[36]

Other portraits of the atomic age designed for teenage consumption were not so optimistic. Comic books of the 1950s, which many blamed for usurping parental authority and inciting juvenile delinquency, fixated on the horrific potential of mutation from radiation poisoning. The foundation myth of the Incredible Hulk, for example, is that scientist David Banner is exposed to gamma rays from an atomic explosion and becomes the Hulk, a monstrous, uncontrollable manifestation of anger. Similarly, Spiderman is an atomic by-product; science student Peter Parker morphs into the superhero after being bitten by an irradiated spider. Superman's writers also introduced kryptonite, the substance that incinerates Superman's home planet, and

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[33] Allan M Winkler, Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.115

[34] Ibid.

[35] Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak, The Fifties: The Way We Really Were (New York: Doubleday, 1977), p.67

[36] Winkler, p.140-1

kryptonite rays that disable his powers, clear allusions to nuclear bombs and radiation.[37]

Such dystopianism undermined visions of a beneficent atom. Children of this era were expected to believe that the atom was capable of both miraculous social benefit and grave apocalyptic destruction, relieve world hunger and cause monstrous mutation. Darker visions of nuclearism became more prevalent once the Soviets acquired the bomb in 1949. Young people were most likely to notice this confusing shift in tone. No doubt, this shift left them somewhat incredulous toward adult attempts to manage the atomic threat, and these children went on to comprise the bulk of the youth culture in the mid-1950s. Furthermore, the incalculable psychological damage done to the young as the first generation to confront the possibility of nuclear apocalypse surely fostered some youth resentment toward parents who had borne them into such an uncertain future and adults who had placed the world in jeopardy.

Indeed, a scene from Rebel Without a Cause – made by Nicholas Ray, a director who was preoccupied with juvenile delinquency and intimate with youth culture – illuminates this connection between the prospect of nuclear apocalypse and teenagers' rejection of adult authority. A group of high school students attend a planetarium show. The class initially mocks the presentation until the presenter ends the show with a depiction of the apocalypse emanating from a big bang: "We will disappear into the blackness of space from which we came, destroyed – as we began – in a burst of gas and fire." Although there is no mention of the bomb, the allusion is clear as the horrified students cower under the rain of exploding mushroom clouds above them. As the students exit, an exasperated teacher tries in vain to get their attention and organise an orderly exit from the planetarium. Meanwhile, Buzz and his gang of delinquents head to the car park, where they slash the tyres of Jim's car, before Buzz provokes Jim to engage him in a switchblade knife fight; Buzz refers to this potentially fatal fight as "just a crazy game." When a security guard tries to intervene, they steal his hat and taunt him with Nazi salutes. Confronted with the prospect of nuclear apocalypse, students ignore the orders of their teachers and mock the authority of adult officials; they reflect the nuclear era's devaluation of life by jeopardising their own lives for fun.

[37] Ibid., p.98-9

The prospect of nuclear apocalypse certainly eroded adults' guardianship of children, casting particular cynicism over exhortations to plan soberly and conservatively for the future. As the protagonist of the exploitation film The Beat Generation explained to his girlfriend: "Play it cool, chick. You've gotta *go*. Everybody's gotta move. I mean, you can't just sit still and wait for the next mushroom cloud, you dig? There's no tomorrow, not while the sky drools radiation gumdrops. You gotta live for kicks."[38] While not all youths responded to the prospect of nuclear attack with the explicit Dionysian nihilism of The Beat Generation's protagonist nor the self-destructive delinquency of the gang in Rebel Without A Cause, these films reflected young people's unease and agitation that often manifested in anti-social and anti-authoritarian behaviour.

The dread with which this anti-authoritarian behaviour, labelled as 'juvenile delinquent', was reported in the media also contributed to the formation of the youth culture. That is, the discourse of juvenile delinquency worked to highlight the contours of the nascent youth culture and in doing so helped to cultivate the sense of an acute difference between teenagers and adults. Moreover, 'juvenile delinquents' were constructed in such menacing terms that young people with a predisposition to challenge adult authority could not help but identify with and draw inspiration from these demonised young 'criminals'. In this way, the discourse of juvenile delinquency, through which esteemed public figures like J. Edgar Hoover likened the threat posed by young hoodlums to that posed by the much-feared Communist, inadvertently emphasised how potent was the youth culture's ability to shock, upset and worry adults. To some teenagers, this undoubtedly rendered participation in the youth culture illicitly attractive, a way of clearly articulating one's rebellion against adult authority.

Other elements of containment culture impelled youngsters to defy the authority of their parents. Youth confronted a central contradiction inherent to containment culture's merger with laissez-faire capitalism. They enjoyed greater mobility and disposable income in a consumer market that catered to their wants and needs and that identified them as a distinct and independent group from adults. Yet, such pleasures were frequently threatened by containment culture's retreat into social conservatism, as America obsessed over sexual habits, gender roles and social rituals

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[38] The Beat Generation. Dir. Charles Haas. Perf. Ray Anthony, Mamie van Doran, Vampira, Jim Mitchum, Louis Armstrong. Albert Zugsmith Productions. 1959.

in the name of national security. Expert opinion eclipsed individual agency, policing containment's boundaries by demarcating 'normality'. Young women's horizons rapidly contracted, as housewifery and motherhood constituted the only socially acceptable objectives. For boys, hegemonic gender imperatives were equally unappealing. Despite connoting effeteness and emasculation, the man in the grey flannel suit was held up as the type of masculinity to which boys should aspire. While the young did, eventually, emulate these social roles in great numbers as they matured, the youth culture provided space to explore, if only temporarily, alternatives to containment culture before the shackles of adulthood tightened.

As Buffalo teenagers' defiant tribute to James Dean exemplified, the youth culture used popular media to cultivate its sense of unity, to express its rebellious difference from adult culture and to explore the alternatives to containment culture. Young people capitalised on the expanding range of media available in the postwar period – like television, music radio, and comic books – and on technological developments – like transistor radios, 45rpm records and portable record players – that made these media less expensive, more mobile and more accessible. Increasingly, rebellious youth gravitated toward products and media texts that reflected their difference from adult culture. Often, youngsters consumed products and media texts that adults most reviled and that countered the containment narrative's notion of America's harmoniousness, such as horror and science fiction comic books, crime and gangster television programs, juvenile delinquency films and rock n roll music.

Yet the discourse of juvenile delinquency constantly displaced youth's active and rebellious use of popular culture onto questions of aberrant media representations and psychologically vulnerable youngsters. Such discourse, as we will soon see, cast youngsters as pliable victims of irresponsible, malevolent or even Communist-inspired media outlets. These outlets, it was alleged, preyed on dysfunctional families' lack of paternal authority to 'infect' helpless children and turn them delinquent. Social theorists appealed to the binaries of containment, depicting mainstream America as healthy and 'normal' but threatened by external deviance. Thus, juvenile delinquency was always constructed as emanating, akin to a disease, from outside the ideal middle class family, outside the suburban home and outside the healthy organism of 'normal' American society.

Containment, Communism and Juvenile Delinquency

Communism was similarly depicted as a disease emanating from outside the healthy organism of 'normal' American society. Edgar Friedenberg's astute comment that the "teen-ager seems to have replaced the Communist as the appropriate target for public controversy and foreboding"[39] suggested how containment rhetoric constructed both juvenile delinquency and Communism as dangerous 'others' that needed to be contained. It was not that juvenile delinquency and Communism were considered isomorphic. Rather, the fact that the same metaphors were used to explain them suggests that both were deciphered through the same pervasive cultural framework of containment. Like the Red Scare, then, juvenile delinquency hysteria served as a discursive arena for wider social concerns. Like the spectre of Communism, juvenile delinquency hysteria worked to solidify 'normal' and 'healthy' gender roles that would provide a bulwark for the family against contamination from 'outside'. Through the discourse of containment, both 'Communism' and 'juvenile delinquency' were culturally constructed to legitimate paternal authority as mediated through expert authority.

As we have seen, the policy of 'containment' originated in George Kennan's 'containment thesis'. As Andrew Ross argues, Kennan's thesis established several of the major metaphors that comprised America's containment narrative, which "anticipates, if it does not exactly advocate, the Red scare that generated much of the postwar hysteria about aliens, bugs, pods, microbes, germs, and other demonologies of the Other that pervaded the culture and politics of the fifties."[40] Kennan's thesis established the predominant metaphor of the Red Scare: that Communism was a disease. Kennan posited that resisting and containing the Communist threat depended on the "health and vigor of our own society" for "[w]orld communism is like a malignant parasite, which feeds only on diseased tissue."[41] As such, Communism should be studied with the same kind of detachment with which a "doctor studies an unruly and unreasonable individual."[42]

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[39] Gilbert, p.200

[40] Ross, p.47

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

As the Red Scare intensified, the Communist-as-disease metaphor pervaded public discourse. In 1950, Attorney General J. Howard McGrath alleged that the Communist is "everywhere – in factories, offices, butcher shops, on street corners, in private businesses – each carries with him the germs of death."[43] In 1952 a judge refused to grant bail to five aliens who were being held despite never being convicted or even charged with a crime. In explaining his decision, the judge evoked the logic of containment: "I am not going to turn these people loose if they are Communists, any more than I would turn loose a deadly germ in this community."[44] In 1957 the Slovak League of America pledged to "fight against [Communism] with all the means at its command until the dread plague... is wiped off the face of the earth."[45] Throughout this period, the spread of Communism throughout Asia and Europe was depicted in red on world maps, echoing epidemiological maps of the human body where the infected area of the body shows up in red.

As a strategy to combat Communism, containment seems somewhat pessimistic given the era's optimism surrounding its ability to defeat germs. That is, these epidemiological constructions of Communism seem to imbue the Communist micro-organism with a potency exceeding that of the 'microbes' against which Eisenhower declared war in the 1950s. The widening use of penicillin, antibiotics and other prescription drugs, as well as the government-sponsored polio vaccination program in 1955, led some to predict that infectious diseases would soon be eradicated.[46] However, the 'diseases' of both Communism and juvenile delinquency could merely be 'contained' rather than eliminated completely.

These disease metaphors reveal another contradiction of containment. On the one hand, the American public was urged to be vigilant and retain familial health and 'normality' in order to keep Communism at bay. On the other hand, the Communist disease was thought to have already penetrated the American national 'body'. As Bragdon and McCutchen's History of a Free People (1954), a school textbook,

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Stephen Whitfield, The Culture of the Cold War (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1991), p.33

[45] Philip Jenkins, The Cold War at Home: The Red Scare in Pennsylvania, 1945-1960 (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p.147

[46] Oakley, p.313

warned schoolchildren: "Unquestioning party members are found everywhere. Everywhere they are willing to engage in spying, sabotage, and the promotion of unrest on orders from Moscow."[47] Communists were thought to have deceptively blended into American society, rendering themselves indistinguishable from anyone else. The depiction of Communism as a ubiquitous, invisible and pervasive disease that has already infected American society, then, suggested the ultimate 'uncontainability' of this threat, and the futility of individual vigilance. This contradiction, in turn, was legitimated by, and was contained by, the intervention of 'experts'. If Communism, already rampant in society, defies 'ordinary' comprehension, if it is beyond the 'diagnosis' of laymen, then it is up to the National Security State, with its branches of 'experts', to diagnose and quarantine Communism.

Like Communism, juvenile delinquency was frequently linked to contagion, contamination and disease. In 1954, the Saturday Evening Post reported that the Manhattan Children's Court "helps a child who becomes delinquent in the same thorough, scientific way that a hospital team would help him if he were stricken with polio."[48] In a Woman's Home Companion article entitled "Nice Girls Can Be Delinquent" the author examines a school's shoplifting problem and asks "What had caused shoplifting to spread like measles through the school, infecting at least 25 girls?"[49] The Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, Oveta Hobby, in 1953 described youth vandalism as "contagious."[50] Writing in the New York Times in 1955, Harris B. Peck linked delinquency to "psychological disturbances... bed-wetting, nervous tics, eating and sleeping disorders."[51] When exploring the benefits of "community censorship," the subcommittee investigating motion pictures' relationship with juvenile delinquency noted: "It is true also that adequate safeguards of emotional health and climate on a community level are just as necessary as the

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[47] Whitfield, p.33

[48] Richard Clendenen, "Shame of America" in Saturday Evening Post 227: January 15, 1955, p.19

[49] Murray Morgan, "Nice Girls Can Be Delinquent" in Woman's Home Companion 81: March 1954, p.64

[50] "Youth is Your Business" in Newsweek 42: November 9, 1953, p.35

[51] Harris B. Peck, "Are the Parents the 'Delinquents'?" in New York Times September 12, 1954, p.34

physical safeguards ordinarily accepted as vital in the area of public-health control, such as in communicable diseases."[52]

Some social theorists and institutional mouthpieces took these rhetorical links between juvenile delinquency and Communism to their logical extreme by alleging that juvenile delinquency was a conspiracy orchestrated by foreigners and even Communists. The Senate subcommittee investigating the relationship between comic books and juvenile delinquency, for example, hinted at this in depicting teenagers' favourite reading material as undermining America's global image. It alleged that it had "evidence that comic books are being utilized by the U. S. S. R. to undermine the morale of youth in many countries by pointing to crime and horror as portrayed in American comics as one of the end results of the most successful capitalist nation in the world."[53] Others perceived a closer connection between delinquency and Communism. In 1954 the director of the Chicago Crime Prevention Bureau, Lois Higgins, alleged that Communists were spreading drugs and obscene materials within American society to corrupt the morals of youth. She urged: "Let us tell [our children] about the secret weapons of our enemy. Let us tell them, too, that the obscene material that is flooding the Nation today is another cunning device of our enemies, deliberately calculated to destroy the decency and morality which are the bulwarks of society."[54] Similarly, Richard Clendenen, one of the senior members of the Senate subcommittee investigating juvenile delinquency, reported in 1955 that the drugs teenagers were consuming came from "factories recently established in Tientsin and Mukden in Red China."[55]

Because mothers were perceived as responsible for the health of the family, mothers were blamed for the entry of both the Communist and juvenile delinquency 'diseases' into the family. The containment narrative held that 'deviant' motherhood threatened to decimate traditional paternal authority on which familial 'normality'

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[52] U. S. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, Motion Pictures and Juvenile Delinquency, Report of the Committee on the Judiciary, 84th Congress, 2nd session, 1956 [hereafter cited as Motion Pictures and Juvenile Delinquency], p.13

[53] U. S. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency, Interim Report to the Committee on the Judiciary, 84th Congress, 2nd session, 1955 [hereafter cited as Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency], p.20

[54] Gilbert, p.75

[55] Richard Clenedenen, "The Shame of America: Part Three," Saturday Evening Post, January 22, 1955, p.25

depended. This threat to dominant masculinity was also a threat to binary gender roles, which, according to the sexual ideology of the fifties, in turn threatened to create sexual deviance, in the form of homosexuality, in both the subordinated husband and the son(s) who emulated him. As a sign of 'inherent weakness', homosexuality was imagined to be ripe for Communist seduction and infiltration. As Michael Rogin points out, in anti-communist narratives, the mother (or the female) is generally portrayed as the source of Communism because she produces this familial deviance.[56] This logic carried over into real life, too, as in the Rosenberg trial, contrary to evidence, 'mom' was blamed for the entry of Communism. As co-counsel of the American Civil Liberties Union Morris Ernst insisted, "Julius is the slave and his wife, Ethel, the master."[57]

As with Communism, deviant maternal influences were blamed for the spread of juvenile delinquency. An anecdote from Richard Clendenen's series of articles, "The Shame of America," on the Senate's investigation into juvenile delinquency in The Saturday Evening Post makes this connection between deviant mothers and juvenile delinquency clear. Rather than citing actual evidence, Clendenen preferred to describe imagined scenarios that he felt were archetypal of the delinquency scourge. In one of these scenarios, Clendenen depicts the descent into delinquency of a boy named Bill. He begins by asserting that "Bill wasn't mean or wild… [o]n the contrary, he was a good-looking, fair-haired Norweigan boy." Further, he points out that Bill "lived with his mother in one of the better apartment houses in the downtown area." In other words, because Bill was white and fairly affluent, he was, according to traditional definitions of delinquency, an unlikely candidate to fall victim to the delinquency epidemic.

But Clendenen soon makes it clear why Bill becomes a miscreant. Although Bill was often "mixed up in pranks that were frowned upon by school authorities," he "was no real cause for concern" until his mother impeded the normal course of institutional authority. When Bill is caught joy riding with friends, "Bill's mother rushed to the rescue, paid for a damaged fender and persuaded the owner of the car to forget the incident." When Bill gets in trouble at school, "his mother intervened with a

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[56] See Michael Rogin, Ronald Reagan, the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.236-71

[57] Ibid., p.257

friend on the school board and the charges were dropped." When Bill breaks into a neighbourhood store, "mother hired the best lawyer in town and the case wasn't prosecuted." Finally, Bill is caught joy riding again, and this time appears before to juvenile court and is sent to the Indiana Boys' School for rehabilitation. "Upon the urging of a probation officer," Bill's mother eventually "promised to co-operate with the school authorities."

Only when Bill's mother subordinates herself to institutionalised paternal authority does "Bill settle down to work with good prospects of success. But after three months, mother can stay away no longer. She hires more lawyers. She appealed to state officials. Finally, she visited Bill." "Mother" promised to remove Bill, and with mother wedging herself between the delinquent and the curative powers of institutionalised authority, "Bill's progress at the school ended abruptly." Ultimately, the efforts of Bill's bossy and over-involved mother yield dire results:

> When three weeks passed with no sign that he would be released, Bill ran away. A few days later he stole an automobile and drove it into Ohio, where he was arrested. The boy who started out with everything in his favour except an overindulgent mother ended up in the Indiana Reformatory at Pendleton, with his best chance for rehabilitation behind him.[58]

Essentially, women were blamed for assuming men's familial role, either by working and being absent from the home, or by being bossy and overindulgent like Bill's mother, refusing to remain subordinate to her husband's dominance. Clendenen's article, typical of delinquency hysteria, advocates reinforcing paternal authority, often through punitive institutions, as the cure for this deviance.

The Red Scare and juvenile delinquency shaped and solidified the boundaries of containment, but these scares were not manufactured solely to legitimate the dominance of the postwar hegemonic bloc. The Red Scare created anxiety about a *real* threat, a *real* enemy to American capitalism. The spread of Communism internationally *did* pose a potential obstacle to American global hegemony; there *were* Soviet spies in American society, and keeping atomic secrets from the enemy *was* vital to American national security. But it is worth emphasising that proponents of the Red Scare deliberately exaggerated the Communist menace for their own political and economic benefit, substituting suspicion for fact and rumour for evidence.

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[58] Richard Clendenen, "Shame of America" in Saturday Evening Post 227: January 15, 1955, p.19

Similarly, juvenile delinquency hysteria was based on real changes in the youth culture and took as its evidence actual crime perpetrated by adolescents. But, like the Red Scare, the level of anxiety aroused in juvenile delinquency discourse vastly exceeded the extent of crime perpetrated. It is difficult not to see this anxiety as the product of adult authorities' attempts to rein in the behaviour of youths who were enjoying increasing cultural independence in the postwar consumer economy and using that freedom to challenge the central cultural narrative of containment that legitimated the postwar hegemonic order. Typical of America's containment narrative, young people's behaviour was interpreted not as a rejection of hegemony but as a manifestation of social illness that required adult intervention to cure it. Again according to the logic of containment, this illness was not considered the product of a defective society, for mainstream America was 'healthy' and 'harmonious', but of corrosive outside influence. The source most frequently blamed for corrupting the young and causing juvenile delinquency was the "mass media."

The Mass Media and Juvenile Delinquency

As Gilbert points out, for many the media was a logical scapegoat to hold responsible for corrupting the nation's youth. As "an outside force guided from media centers in New York and Hollywood," it had the ability to reach children in all areas and classes, and it could penetrate the home.[59] The media, and principally television, was conceived as a threat to paternal authority and charged with inciting juvenile delinquency. Dr. Ralph Banay, a research psychiatrist from Columbia University, stated: "If the proverb is true that prison is a college for crime, I believe for young disturbed adolescents, TV is a preparatory school for delinquency."[60] One government representative demanded that the "juvenile delinquent called television" be censored "before it ruins itself and debases everybody with whom it has contact."[61]

Such suspicions of the media's destructive potential were particularly prevalent in the Senate's investigation into the causes and effects of juvenile delinquency. In particular, the Senate focused on television programs, radio dramas,

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[59] Gilbert, p.77

[60] TV and Juvenile Delinquency, p.30

[61] Lynn Spigel, Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p.54

comic books and films that challenged the containment narrative's notion of America's harmoniousness, namely crime, horror and mystery stories. Summarising a survey of television programs aired during what the subcommittee termed "children's hours," which it defined as between 4pm and 10pm, the subcommittee

> found that life is cheap; death, suffering, sadism, and brutality are subjects of callous indifference and that judges, lawyers, and law-enforcement officers are too often dishonest, incompetent, and stupid. The manner and frequency with which crime through this medium is brought before the eyes and ears of American children indicates inadequate regard for psychological and social consequences.[62]

The popular press made it clear what many adult Americans felt were the "psychological and social consequences" of such portrayals; that children copied the activities and behaviours they saw on television. As Lynn Spigel documents,

> the popular press circulated stories about a six-year-old who asked his father for real bullets because his sister didn't die when he shot her with his toy gun… a nine-year-old who proposed killing his teacher with a box of poison chocolates, an eleven-year-old who shot his television set with his BB-gun, a thirteen-year-old who stabbed her mother with a kitchen knife, and a sixteen-year-old babysitter who strangled a sleeping baby to death – all, of course, after witnessing similar moments on television.[63]

The subcommittee seldom made such crude analyses directly correlating a young person's actions with an event depicted on television, but the notion of adolescents' susceptibility to unhealthy suggestions from the media permeated the hearings.

The initial investigation in 1953 ended with the subcommittee commissioning further investigations into the relationship between juvenile delinquency and the mass media. In 1955 and 1956 the subcommittee heard testimony from all over the country, mainly from 'experts' like psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, criminologists and authorities who dealt with delinquent children about the perceived effects of the mass media on young people's behaviour. Although it provided space for a variety of voices to be heard, and its multiple voices often contradicted one another, the investigation gave greatest credence to the opinion of 'experts' when presenting its findings. As the report on television and juvenile delinquency emphasised, "weight shall be given to opinion derived from experience and evaluated by persons

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[62] TV and Juvenile Delinquency, p.31

[63] Lynn Spigel, Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), p.194-5

possessing training" rather than the layman's "'when I was a boy' basis for understanding human behavior."[64]

In 1955, the subcommittee published its report on comic books and juvenile delinquency, followed by reports on delinquency's relationship to television, radio and motion pictures a year later. Because these separate reports cite much of the same evidence, are girded by the same assumptions about both the media's social role and the behaviour of youth, and utilise much testimony that generalises about 'the mass media' rather than any specific medium, these reports can be interpreted together as one body of work. As the state's comprehensive and 'official' response to juvenile delinquency, these reports reflect the era's dominant attitudes toward delinquency and the era's dominant theories about juvenile delinquency's causes and effects and how best to treat it.

Placing these reports alongside a critical analysis of America's containment narrative reveals both these reports' intended effect and their inherent inconsistencies. Moreover, it suggests how such reports obfuscate the character of 1950s youth rebellion while preserving containment's vital structuring boundaries. Characterising the media as an entity that is often at odds with the national consensus, a threat to paternal authority and a primary cause of juvenile delinquency allows the subcommittee to perpetuate adults' hierarchical dominance over adolescents in two interconnected ways. First, by blaming the media for imposing deviance upon youngsters rather than acknowledging the youth culture's creative use of the media for their own purposes, the subcommittee can displace the social critique suggested by young people's use of the media onto questions of aberrant media representations. Second, because delinquency is conceived as emanating from a corrosive external source and teenagers are not conceived as active agents, adults can, as the subcommittee here does, legitimate their role as cultural arbiters (or gatekeepers) on behalf of the young, censoring the cultural products to which youth have access.

These hearings recapitulated perennial debates concerning young people's access to the media. As Lynn Spigel argues, adults have frequently viewed the mass media with suspicion, seeing it "as a threatening force that circulates forbidden secrets to children, and that does so in ways that parents and even the state cannot fully control." From dime novels in the nineteenth century to movie matinees in the 1920s

[64] TV and Juvenile Delinquency, p.53

and 1930s, adult culture has monitored the young's entertainment and "survey[ed] their pleasure," continually trying "to filter the knowledge that mass media transmit to the young." The notion that "children were pliable, innocent creatures who needed to be guided by adults" underpinned these debates. As Spigel observes, since the 1910s professional scientists had stressed to parents that "it was the adult's responsibility to generate moral values in the young by guarding the gates of knowledge. By doling out adult secrets only at the proper stages in child development, parents could ensure that children would carry the torch of progress for future generations." Any mistake in this parental supervision of information, experts warned, "could prove fatal – not only for the individual child, but for the moral character of the entire nation." [65]

The postwar period intensified these concerns about the media's role in influencing young people and the future progress of the nation. In the popular media, the baby boom generation was considered "a new symbol of hope" for the future; they were innocent in that "they did not know what their parents knew, they hadn't lived through the hardships of the Great Depression and the war, nor did they bear the blame."[66] Yet, the fear of Communism, the threat of atomic war and especially the perceived explosion in juvenile delinquency sullied this hope. Also, the expansion of types of media (such as the introduction of television and the explosion in range of radio programs and comic books) along with the increasing accessibility of media forms coincided with young people's growing financial independence and physical mobility. Young people's increasing exposure to media that was unsanctioned and unsupervised by adults elevated parents' sense of being "left out of the mediation loop."[67] This was exacerbated by the growing youth market, which addressed youngsters directly and groomed the 'peer group', not adults, as arbiters of taste.

In this context, the media was frequently blamed for usurping parental authority. Television, in particular, was often accused of undermining parents' authority over children. As TV critic John Crosby put it, "You tell little Oscar to trot off to bed, and you will probably find yourself embroiled in an argument. But if Milton Berle tells him to go to bed, off he goes."[68] As children grew into adolescence,

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[65] Spigel, Welcome to the Dreamhouse, p.190-1

[66] Ibid., p.187

[67] Ibid., p.190

[68] Ibid., p.196

many feared that television would reveal adulthood's secrets prematurely, which would undermine adult authority and have "fatal consequences" for the development of the child. As journalist Robert Lewis Shayon warned in 1951, "Television is the shortest cut yet devised, the most accessible backdoor to the grownup world."[69] The subcommittee also singles television out as the most pernicious influence because of its accessibility to youngsters:

> There is reason to believe that television crime programs are potentially much more injurious to children and young people than motion pictures, radio, or comic books. Attending a movie requires money and the physical effort of leaving the home, so an average child's exposure to films in the theater tends to be limited to a few hours a week. Comic books demand strong imaginary projections. Also, they must be sought out and purchased. But television, available at a flick of a knob and combining visual and audible aspects into a 'live' story, has a greater impact on its child audience.[70]

In light of the easy access that most youngsters had to not only television but, increasingly, a wide range of media forms, the subcommittee urges the necessity of preserving adults' dominance over youths, as it shows when it quotes the testimony of Dr. Edward Podolsky:

> It has been my experience that presenting crime films, sadism, and illicit sex in an attractive and adventurous form in the mass media of the movies, television, radio, fiction, and the comics, has a very definite and decided effect, in a few cases, of initiating and sustaining a social and criminal activity in juveniles and adolescents. The human mind in these age groups is quite impressionable and easily conditioned. By constant and repeated presentation of undesirable and criminal activity in mass media, many children and adolescents many times accept these as an attractive way of living.[71]

It is the mass media's irresponsible (as inferred in "attractive and adventurous") depiction of crime, sadism, and sex that "initiates" and "sustains" juvenile criminality; the young do not initiate their own actions, nor are they active consumers of the mass media for their own purposes. Instead, adolescents are "quite impressionable and easily conditioned." Because of the young's malleability, the media shapes youth behaviour through its "constant and repeated presentation of undesirable and criminal activity." In Podolsky's testimony, there is no clear distinction made between

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[69] Ibid., p.198

[70] TV and Juvenile Delinquency, p.31

[71] Motion Pictures and Juvenile Delinquency, p.16-7

children, juveniles and adolescents; all are equally impressionable and are thus equally prey to the persistence of the media. By not acknowledging the complexity of youth as consumers, and suggesting the media's irresponsibility, adult experts like Podolsky can legitimate their role as cultural gatekeepers on behalf of youth, controlling and censoring the media products presented to youngsters.

Similarly, the testimony of Dr. Irving Sands legitimates the gatekeeping role that perpetuates adults' dominance over the young by alleging that youngsters' impressionability makes them vulnerable to sickness. He testified:

> Children are notoriously susceptible to suggestion. They imitate their elders. They hear and see much more than we believe they do. They mimic their elders. Their nervous systems are very pliable and they are extremely receptive to all stimuli, be they good or bad. Children are particularly apt to become hero worshipers and are likely to follow the behavior patterns of those whom they regard as leaders and especially when the latter are the center of attention. Youngsters are too immature and inexperienced to properly evaluate conduct patterns and to differentiate between good and bad behavior. Hence, they fall victims to mass psychology that makes heroes out of mobsters and criminals. It is tragically true that some radio and television programs, and especially some war, crime, and illicit sex comic books portray in lurid detail, acts of revolting fashions. Rarely is the ultimate plight of the criminal adequately described and seldom is the disgrace that he brings to his family described in a manner that might be of some constructive influence. All that remains with these youngsters is a sense of unresolved emotional tension that not infrequently produces physical distress and mental illness.[72]

Like Podolsky, Sands collapses the distinction between "youngsters" and "children," seeing all youth through the lens of the 'juvenile delinquency problem'. Also like Podolsky, Sands emphasises that the young, with their pliant nervous systems and their non-discriminating hypersensitivity to "all stimuli, be they good or bad," are highly impressionable. Because, unlike wise and discerning professionals like Sands, youths are "too immature and inexperienced to properly evaluate conduct patterns and to differentiate between good and bad behaviour," they can "fall victims to" the evils the media disseminates. Sands laments the media's lack of ideological controls that result in its failure to mete out adequate justice to criminals and emphasises the dangers this poses to youngsters in producing, "not infrequently," "physical distress and mental illness." The implication is, then, that because the young's physical and mental pliancy makes them vulnerable to illness emanating from irresponsible media representations, adult experts must act as medical interveners on youth's behalf.

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[72] Ibid., p.16

In emphasising the media's 'irresponsibility', both Podolsky and Sands were articulating a prevailing suspicion in the postwar period of the media's potential to corrupt. In the aftermath of revelations about Goebbels and the Nazi use of propaganda techniques during the war, many were wary of the media's ability to manipulate mass opinion. More pressing, in terms of the era's pervasive crisis of masculinity, was the media's 'effeminate' character, which provoked concerns that the media was usurping and emasculating traditional paternal authority within the home. Novelist and social commentator Phillip Wylie connected these two suspicions of the media's potential to corrupt, apocalyptically depicting television's threat to masculinity in the 1955 edition of his best-seller Generation of Vipers: "Just as Goebbels has revealed what can be done with such a mass-stamping of the public psyche in his nation, so our land is a living representation of the same fact worked out in matriarchal sentimentality, goo, slop, hidden cruelty, and the foreshadow of national death." He linked the effeminacy of television to his theory of 'Momism', alleging that 'Mom' "will not rest until every electronic moment has been bought to sell suds and every bought program censored to the last decibel and syllable according to her self-adulation – along with that (to the degree the mom-indoctrinated pops are permitted access to the dials) of her de-sexed, de-souled, de-cerebrated mate."[73] Despite its hysterical tone, Wylie's analysis reflects postwar America's suspicion that consumption was inherently feminine, and the expansion of technology that promoted consumption gravely threatened both hegemonic masculinity and containment culture. Wylie's piece also indexed prevalent concerns about the media's potential to usurp paternal authority, and the disastrous effects that could yield for future generations; that 'feminised' television, usurping the parental role and directly addressing and moulding the male child, would confuse his sense of gender normality, leading inevitably to delinquency.

The investigation into the relationship between juvenile delinquency and the mass media registered these concerns. For example, while ruminating on the social changes television had wrought, the subcommittee speculated:

> The far-reaching development in the technical facilities for communication of ideas in recent years show many evidences of impact. Many parents and educators are genuinely concerned with the impact of such technological developments upon youth. In this connection, it is observed that this is another

[73] Quoted in Spigel, Make Room for TV, p.62

> example of modern technical know-how outdistancing our social understanding and control.[74]

Here, technology poses a threat to 'containment'. The detrimental impact of technology is not its adverse affect on the young as such, but its loosening of the traditional authority of "parents and educators" and its ability to exceed "our" – that is, adults' – understanding and control. That is, the subcommittee fears that the media's continual metamorphosis into indecipherable shapes and its increasing expansion – like the spread of international Communism – threatens to exceed the boundaries of containment.

Because youngsters are conceived as pliant and passive ciphers rather than active consumers, their aberrant delinquent behaviour cannot emanate from them but must come from some corrosive force. The logic goes that if adolescents are displaying 'anti-social' behaviours that do not reflect the values that "parents and educators" inculcate, then some powerful and pervasive outside force must be responsible. In blaming the media for usurping traditional authority and spreading these contrary values, the subcommittee invests the media with just this power and pervasiveness. For example, the subcommittee alleges "that dramatized images on a screen are more powerful in their effort upon the human mind and imagination than the printed word. New methods of picture magnification and sound fidelity employed in the latest movies have increased this power."[75] That is, technological advancements overwhelm the young's undeveloped critical faculties, and thus threaten to erode containment's boundaries.

In holding the media to blame for causing delinquency, the subcommittee displaced the implicit rebellion suggested by young people's consumption of the media onto questions of media representation. This is best illuminated in the subcommittee's nuanced explanation that the media influences but does not directly produce the behaviour of juvenile delinquents:

> You cannot say *a* child will see *a* movie and then commit *an* act of delinquency. But the subcommittee does believe that with the prevailing world conditions, with the uncertainty of the draft, with the lurking thought of atomic destruction; with all these as background, an atmosphere of violence is being assumed and conveyed by the mass media. While these media are, on the one

[74] TV and Juvenile Delinquency, p.2

[75] Motion Pictures and Juvenile Delinquency, p.7

> hand, reflecting the behavior of the older generation, they are, in turn, forming the minds of the younger generation, and that is where our greatest danger lies.[76]

This acknowledges the violent social conditions of the world and thus risks admitting that juvenile delinquency may be the result of a failing social order. But this potential critique of the prevailing social order is displaced onto the media, for the problem here – "our greatest danger" – is that "an atmosphere of violence is *being assumed and conveyed by* the mass media." In other words, if the mass media avoided addressing the dangers of the "world situation," then it would not adversely affect "the minds of the younger generation." The problem, then, is not that the world is a violent place haunted by the prospect of nuclear apocalypse, but that the mass media portrays it as such.

The solutions that the subcommittee proposed to the media's incitation of juvenile delinquency clearly invoke the logic of containment. To halt the media's breakdown of paternal authority that produced delinquency, the subcommittee posited 'proper' parental roles, as mediated through 'expert' authority, as the cure to juvenile delinquency. Among its concluding remarks on the relationship between television and juvenile delinquency, the subcommittee recommended further research on parental roles:

> We need to study the extent to which parents understand the emotional needs of their children. We need studies which would result in ideas as to how the average family can create an atmosphere which will compete with television. The difficulty of these problems should not be underrated. It is hard enough for a mother with several children just to keep the household going. She cannot, in addition, be expected to be a creative psychologist all day long. And just exhortation to be a good mother won't help. Only detailed and large-scale studies of what actually goes on in the home will lead to advice which is concrete enough so that the average mother can utilize it.[77]

Appeals to the "average family" and the "average mother" reflect the 1950s family ideal where the woman 'naturally' stays home and looks after the children. This passage also pits parents in a battle against television for ultimate authority over children. Although the mother is 'naturally' responsible for the psychological health of her children, the 'normal' motherhood role does not come naturally, for "just exhortation to be a good mother won't help" defeat the threat of television. Only expert knowledge – the knowledge of the "creative psychologist" that the "average

[76] Ibid., p.2-3

mother" cannot be expected to possess – compiled from pervasive surveillance of internal familial relations ("detailed and large-scale studies of what actually goes on in the home") can produce advice "concrete enough" to cement proper parenting roles. In other words, proper parenting roles can cure delinquency, but it must be up to experts, not parents themselves, to define what 'proper' is.

The social construction of juvenile delinquency posited the notion that delinquency – and, by extension, the youth culture with which it was conflated – was a disease that required the intervention of expert authorities. Because youths were so pliable, passive and hence vulnerable to this social illness, they were easy prey for such pervasive and demoralising influences as the media when 'proper' parenting, in the form of paternal authority, broke down. Thus it was up to experts to monitor not only adolescent behaviour but also parenting roles and media representations. The construction of juvenile delinquency stressed that 'delinquency' emanated not so much from the rebellion of the young as from the breakdown of paternal authority that permitted social contaminants. 'Delinquency's' pathological basis thus functioned to displace any potential social critique that teenagers' consumption of the media made, and focus instead on individual 'illness'. Anxieties about juvenile delinquency showed containment's tendency to foster social harmony and social crisis simultaneously. By presenting the American 'self' as healthy and harmonious but under threat from an outside contaminant, juvenile delinquency hysteria worked to legitimate strict policing of containment's boundaries according to expert authority undergirded by hegemonic principles.

But this obscured the character of 1950s youth culture's rebellion. Youngsters were not so passive and pliable. Adult authorities rightly identified the media as the site where youth rebellion was staged, but blaming the media for causing this rebellion missed the point. As this thesis will argue, youths were very active in cultivating their own cultural spaces, predominantly within the postwar media, to escape the control of adults. In these spaces, teenagers activated meanings that resisted and challenged adult hegemony, and, in particular, America's containment narrative.

Frequently mobilised to buttress patriarchal authority within the nuclear family, to displace the social critique implied in a rebellious youth culture, and to

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[77] TV and Juvenile Delinquency, p.55

sever the links between mass media and youth culture, the discourse of juvenile delinquency was woefully ineffective. If anything, the intense focus on juvenile delinquency inadvertently widened the appeal of the fledgling youth culture among young people by underscoring the potent ability of rebellious youth to shock and intimidate adults. As the next two chapters will show, the spectre of the juvenile delinquent – the demonised menacing threat that frightened parents and teachers all over the country – became a figure around which the youth culture fused its sense of unity and emphasised its radical and confrontational difference to adult America. Much to the chagrin of adult authorities, more often than not the youth culture used representations from the mass media – primarily film – to celebrate the juvenile delinquent, revelling in the delinquent's frequent confrontations with, and criticisms of, patriarchal authority.

Chapter 2

The Cool Pose and the Duck's Ass: Stylistic Subversion and 1950s Youth Culture

"The first association that most adults have with the word 'teenager' is 'juvenile delinquent'." – The New Yorker (1958)[1]

Norman Mailer's 1957 essay "The White Negro" synthesised many of the prevalent anxieties surrounding juvenile delinquency in the 1950s. Mailer's "white Negro" was a psychopath, a wilful delinquent rebelling against the bloated, conformist and suffocating "totalitarianism" of mainstream American society. Mailer's "hipster" was the product of cultural miscegenation, a "ménage-a-trois" between the "bohemian, juvenile delinquent and the Negro."[2] Mailer anticipated psychoanalyst Robert Lindner's apocalyptic vision of hordes of leather-jacketed teenage "embryonic Storm-Troopers" menacing middle class America.[3] Although "there are probably not more than one hundred thousand men and women who consciously see themselves as hipsters," the hipster was capable of inspiring millions of emerging juvenile delinquents to direct their anger toward rebellion because the hipster spoke "a language most adolescents can understand instinctively for the hipster's intense view of existence matches their experience and their desire to rebel."[4]

To Mailer, the hipster's psychopathic personality was completely justified in view of the madness of the modern world. The emergence of the hipster was a response to the horrors of the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the creation and detonation of the atomic bomb, and to the numbing, depersonalising effects of postwar society's suburban

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[1] Jon Savage, "The Enemy Within: Sex, Rock and Identity" in Simon Frith (ed.), Facing the Music: Essays on Pop, Rock and Culture (London: Mandarin, 1990), p.144

[2] Norman Mailer, Advertisements for Myself (New York: G. P. Putnam/Berkley Windhover, 1976), p.302

[3] Lindner quoted in James Gilbert, A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.40

[4] Mailer, p.305

living, corporate employment and military-industrial complex mind-control. The modern world threatened "death by *deus ex machina* in a gas chamber or a radioactive city"; collectively "our psyche was subjected itself to the intolerable anxiety that death being causeless, life was causeless as well."[5] In this context, the hipster strove to lie in a heightened perpetual present, for "to respect the past means that one must also respect such ugly consequences of the past as the collective murders of the State."[6] The hipster's response was to enhance the existential moment, "to live with death as immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on the uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self."[7] To the hipster, "individual acts of violence are always to be preferred to the collective violence of the State."[8] The hipster's violence is creative rather than destructive for his violent refusal to abide the constraints of middle class society recasts "acts of violence as the catharsis which prepares growth."[9]

The youth culture that emerged in the middle of the 1950s may not have been as violently predisposed as Mailer's hipster, but the two had much in common. As I outlined in the previous chapter, the youth culture of the 1950s, rebelled against the drab conformity, staid cultural rituals and restricting gender norms of hegemonic adult culture. Mirroring Mailer's hipster, the psychological terror of the atom bomb in part fuelled 1950s youth's desire to reject the parent culture. Like the hipster or "White Negro," 1950s youth culture drew on the cultural demon of the juvenile delinquent and the exotic 'other', in the form of black subcultures, to express its rebellion.

Young people sought to distance themselves from mainstream adult culture to assert their difference, their agency and their autonomy free of the constraints of adult authority, and style was one of the primary modes through which they articulated their rebellion and cultural distinctiveness. Teenagers differentiated themselves from adults in the way that they dressed, spoke, styled their hair, walked and stood still. Style

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[5] Ibid., p.300

[6] Ibid., p.316

[7] Ibid., p.301

[8] Ibid., p.316

[9] Ibid.

emphasised both the possibilities and the limitations of youth culture rebellion. Through style, adolescents explored alternative modes of masculinity and femininity, engaged at least on a symbolic level with cultures of the racial other, and outraged and discomfited adults in the process. Yet, as I will discuss in subsequent chapters, white teens often approached black culture problematically; white youth culture's embrace of the exoticised other, mirroring Mailer's characterisation of "the Negro," was more a critique of the failings of white masculinity than a tangible engagement with black people and black culture. Moreover, young people's attempts to construct virile alternatives to hegemonic masculinity by appropriating black masculinity were often self-defeating and produced ambiguous gender identities that reflected the era's confusion over gender roles.

The Politics of Style

Young people's exploration of alternatives occurred most visibly in terms of style, which became a flashpoint of the juvenile delinquency controversy. Adolescents displayed on their bodies styles that defied sensible grey flannel suits and demure feminine garb. Most distressing to adults, the styles teenagers sported resembled those of marginal white working class and black subcultures. Some teens preferred the elegance of styles inspired by zoot suits of the 1940s and sported in contemporary times by rock n roll stars like Elvis Presley, Little Richard and Richie Valens. These sartorial styles involved outrageously coloured, often two-toned suits that were cut in extravagant styles, tapering dramatically around the ankles and hips, like Elvis's garb worn in his controversial performance on the Milton Berle show in 1956. Others donned combinations of motorcycle boots, jeans, t-shirts, dungarees, leather jackets and (often stained) plaid shirts garnered from working class styles and inspired by icons like Marlon Brando and James Dean. Some groups formed street gangs that were primarily identifiable in terms of style, with personalised leather jackets adorned with insignias and gang patches. The styling of 'long' hair into ducktails and quiffs was the most uniform aspect of the youth style among males, while 'troublesome' girls often emulated boys' styles by wearing jeans and gang jackets.

Concerned adults reacted by declaring adolescent dress habits the front line in the war against juvenile delinquency. To adults, style reflected attitude toward authority, and

young people's divergence from satorial norms signalled their refusal to abide adult authority. Buffalo police captain John Tutuska announced: "We keep a watchful eye on these boys with the black [t-shirts], ducktail haircuts and zoot-suits because they're usually up to no good."[10] Taking this to the logical extreme, Buffalo police announced to high school students that anyone caught wearing a black t-shirt would be arrested.[11] At a high school principals' convention in Washington, DC, in 1957, members voted to suppress blue jeans, ducktail haircuts and Elvis Presley records from future record hops in an attempt to deter anti-social behaviour.[12] In Tacoma, Washington, a judge offered a young offender with long hair and sideburns a choice of ten days in prison or "a man's haircut."[13] Schools, adult-supervised youth groups, and law enforcement agencies combined to combat what one police official described as "the Marlon Brando look"[14] so synonymous with juvenile delinquency.

Youth's stylistic subversion posed a challenge to the social order that was more significant than a mere disagreement over aesthetics. As Dick Hebdige argues in Subculture: the Meaning of Style, the hegemonic order has a "tendency to masquerade as nature" to preserve the social hierarchies that justify its cultural dominance.[15] Preferred forms of discourse and cultural signs work to reinforce notions of the normal, natural and unquestionable. For instance, for the corporate liberal hegemonic bloc that formed in the postwar period, the grey flannel suit was a cultural emblem for the values to which that group aspired. The suit connoted professionalism, conservatism and restraint, and worked as a 'naturally' functional response to a working environment that demanded conformity and consistency from its workers. As John Berger puts it, the suit was a uniform that

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[10] William Graebner, Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era (Philadelphia: Temple University press, 1990), p.58

[11] Ibid.

[12] Karal Ann Marling, As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p.175

[13] Ibid., p.167

[14] William Graebner, "The 'Containment' of Juvenile Delinquency: Social Engineering and American Youth Culture in the Postwar Era" in American Studies, vol 27 (Spring 1986), p.89

[15] Dick Hebdige, Subculture: The Meaning of Style (London: Methuen and co., 1979), p.101-2

idealised *in*action, and displayed "*sedentary* power," for it "was a costume which inhibited vigorous action, and which action ruffled, uncreased and spoilt."[16]

The suit was the normal standard against which all other forms of dress were judged. As one corporate worker of the 1950s reflected, "we had many choices of coloured shirt – as long as it was white. We were all expected to look the same – and everybody did."[17] Implicit penalties were imposed on those who did not adhere to the norm, including social ostracism, potential job loss or missed opportunities for a job or promotion. In some popular culture representations, the appearance of the suit is portrayed as more important than an individual's knowledge or skills. When Gregory Peck's character in Man in the Gray Flannel Suit complains that he does not know anything about public relations after being offered a job, he is told: "You wear a clean shirt, you bathe every day – that's all there is to it."[18] Semiotically, the suit also denoted the middle class. The suit worked to marginalise occupations that did not require suits, occupations that idealised action, namely the working class. The ubiquity of the grey flannel suit in cultural representations of masculinity effaced the working class, black and white, and promoted notions of the universal middle class, legitimating the containment narrative's vision of classless, harmonious America.

By donning the styles of marginalised groups, teenagers countered the containment vision of America for they brought these styles into public visibility, styles which suggested that youth, the harbingers of the future, did not comply with hegemonic values. As Volishinov asserts, cultural signs are open to a variety of "inflections" and are thus arenas of class struggle.[19] Hebdige also argues that "spectacular subcultures" like the 1950s youth culture can pose "a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation" by briefly exposing "the arbitrary nature of the codes which underlie and shape all forms of discourse."[20] Counter-hegemonic statements expressed obliquely

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[16] John Berger, About Looking (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p.34

[17] Clip compiled on The Century: America's Time with Peter Jennings. Volume Four: "1953-1960: Happy Daze." ABC Video and Buena Vista, 1994.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Hebdige, p.17

[20] Ibid., p.86, 91

through style give "the lie to what Althusser has called 'the false obviousness of everyday practice' and [open] up the world of objects to new and covertly oppositional meanings."[21] Radical departures from 'natural' states thus threaten to expose norms as cultural constructs. This is disruptive because hegemony functions by veiling its processes behind the shroud of 'common sense' and 'normality', and obscuring the ideological machinations inherent to these processes. Youth's adoption of clothing from groups that were increasingly marginalised under America's postwar consensus questioned the efficacy of that 'consensus' and the validity of containment's 'classless' society. As Hebdige argues, such departures generally stir up "the most primitive anxieties concerning the sacred distinction between nature and culture," and thus are condemned as heinous, heretic and unnatural[22], just as 1950s 'juvenile delinquent' styles were.

Hebdige invokes Foucault in describing spectacular subcultures' ambiguous relationship to power. As Foucault argues, power is activated through the 'gaze' of an authoritative discourse, be it medical, scientific or penal, that categorises and disciplines individuals through a multiplicity of strategies.[23] Disciplinary measures (and thus power) are activated when deviations from the 'normal', which require intervention, are observed. Thus, as Hebdige asserts, the category of 'youth' only gets activated "when young people make their presence felt by going out of bounds, by dressing strangely, by resisting through rituals, by breaking bottles, windows, heads, by confounding surveillance, by confronting the police, by issuing challenges, by striking… bizarre poses" [Hebdige's ellipsis].[24]

For disciplinary strategies to operate successfully there needs to be a discursive certainty surrounding surveillance; the surveying gaze must be able to demarcate both the 'abnormal' from the 'normal' sign and subversive from submissive intent. However,

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[21] Ibid., p.102

[22] Ibid., p.91-2

[23] See Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (London: Penguin, 1977)

[24] Hebdige, "Posing... Threats, Striking... Poses: Youth, Surveillance and Display" in SubStance, vol.37/38 (1983), p.85

spectacular subcultures have the ability to confound this surveillance through the deployment of indecipherable or 'slippery' signs. As Hebdige writes:

> Subculture forms at the interface between surveillance and the evasion of surveillance. It translates the fact of being under scrutiny into the pleasures of being watched, and the elaboration of surfaces which takes place within it reveals a darker will towards opacity, a drive against classification and control, a desire to exceed.[25]

Such stylistic rebellion necessarily transcends traditional boundaries of political action; because subversive style is 'written' in ephemeral signs not immediately decipherable to discursive gazes it cannot offer tangible political solutions or a 'call to arms' without risking cooptation.[26] Hebdige warns that subcultural responses are "always essentially ambiguous"; they "slip beneath any authoritative interpretation."[27] Such was the case of the 1950s youth culture.

The Wild One and Stylistic Rebellion

The Wild One, a seminal youth culture film that inspired many youths to adopt stylistic subversion, donning leather jackets, jeans and motorcycle boots, provides an example of how stylistic subcultures challenge hegemonic processes and values without offering a tangible 'answer'.[28] The film depicts a motorcycle gang called the Black Rebels Motorcycle Club (BRMC), disaffected outcasts of 1950s America. They roam in packs through small-town America looking for 'kicks'; drunken violence and sexual adventure. The film was based on a true event (the script was inspired by a Harper's magazine article), the Hollister riots. In 1947, the small town of Hollister, population approximately 4000, hosted a motorcycle jamboree for its Fourth of July celebrations. As well as attracting weekend motorcycle enthusiasts, the event also drew fledgling motorcycle gangs like the Booze Fighters, prototypes for the Hell's Angels. The visitors

[25] Ibid., p.86-7

[26] Ibid., p.86

[27] Ibid.

[28] The Wild One. Dir. Laslo Benedek. Per. Marlon Brando, Lee Marvin, Mary Murphy. Columbia Pictures, 1954.

doubled the town's population. Several gangs clashed and overwhelmed the town's authorities, forcing them to call in the militia to round up the gangs and restore order.[29] The film changes the setting to the fictional Wrightsville that the BRMC invades and terrorises. At the film's denouement, state troopers round up the gang and impound their bikes.

The BRMC was based on the motorcycle gangs that were forming in southern California in the late 1940s and early 1950s. These gangs often comprised alienated war veterans who felt unable or unwilling to readjust to life at home. To them, the reconstructed postwar American society of grey flannel suits and suburban houses was anathema. They sought to recapture what they perceived as the thrills and masculine bravado of their war years by living a shiftless existence, roaming free on motorcycles as their idealised masculine forebears had once done on horses. These bikers often adorned their military uniforms with their gang or club names. Ex-pilots, for example, altered their leather flying jackets and emblazoned them with the name of their new affiliation. New inductees purchased their own jackets, initiating the postwar rebel style, which the youth culture adapted from this older generation.

The Wild One was wildly popular in the early 1950s and enshrined the style that law enforcement officials would pejoratively refer to as the 'Marlon Brando look'. The film served to influence disaffected youth by codifying stylistic elements of rebellion, like motorcycles and leather jackets, and inspiring many to rebel accordingly. The film also vindicated existing gangs. As Hunter Thompson argues, the film gave bikers

> a lasting romance-glazed image of themselves, a coherent reflection that only a few had been able to find in a mirror…. They saw themselves as modern Robin Hoods… virile, inarticulate brutes whose good instincts got warped somewhere in the struggle for self-expression and who spent the rest of their violent lives seeking revenge on a world that done them wrong when they were young and defenceless.[30]

One biker, from the Marker Street Commandos, described to Thompson his first view of the film in 1954:

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[29] Hunter S. Thompson, Hell's Angels (London: Penguin Books, 1967), p.73-4

[30] Ibid., p.74-5

> There were about fifty of us, with jugs of wine and our black leather jackets…. We sat up there in the balcony and smoked cigars and drank wine and cheered like bastards. We could see ourselves right there on the screen. We were all Marlon Brando. I guess I must have seen it four or five times.[31]

The film underscores the rebellion of this new style by constantly pitting it against the 'uniform' of adult authority. The film establishes the bikers' generational difference more through attitude and style than age (most of the actors – Lee Marvin, Marlon Brando – would struggle to be categorised as 'young'). This is most evident in the way that they mockingly call authority figures "Daddy," while the police describe the gang as "boys." At the motorcycle race that the gang disrupts by abruptly walking across the track, the officials' white overalls and caps contrast markedly with the gang's black leather jackets, jeans and leather caps. When one official attempts to berate the gang for walking across the track, one biker goads him: "Hey, where can I get me one of those jazzy suits – I wanna look like a street cleaner, too." Exemplifying Hebdige's point that spectacular subcultures expose the machinations of hegemony, the radical differentiation of the bikers' clothes from those of officialdom exposes power relations in the larger culture. The overalls signify subservience to rules and power hierarchies, as it is obvious that the "official" is employed in a menial capacity to clean up after others. The overalls-clad official is a subservient member of the system to which the bikers are antagonistic and scornful. The comment also invokes class in a supposedly classless society, inferring that the official has acquiesced to a subordinate place in the social order in a hegemonic formation that falsely promises each member's admission to a universal middle class.

The bikers' exaggerated difference from mainstream dress codes exposes the arbitrariness of hegemonic codes throughout the film. When the biker gang roars into Wrightsville their clothes sharply contrast with those of the locals, which serve as markers of occupation: mechanic, barman and policeman. Other townsfolk are dressed demurely in a 'uniform' of suits, ties and hats. By contrast, the bikers are dressed not for work but for show; they are dressed for posing rather than social engagement or, for that matter, romantic encounters. One scene that highlights this is when the BRMC's leader, Johnny (played by Marlon Brando) is involved in a heartfelt conversation with Kathy, a

[31] Ibid., p.71

local girl Johnny fancies. As she pours out her heart to Johnny, she begins to cry and lunges to hug him. But Johnny reacts, as Steve Vineberg points out, by giving a "distasteful look… as if she'd spilt something sticky on his jacket," before pushing her off.[32] As Graham McCann emphasises, Johnny's little leather cap and leather jacket that bears the monogram "Johnny" is an "aesthetic pose" that is for display rather than to "get dirty or torn."[33] Such an aesthetic pose reveals the pretence of all codes that are supposed to bear meaning, especially those signifying power. As Johnny says to Kathy, whose father is the local policeman, "Your father wears a hat that says he's a big, important man." Yet if the gang's pose challenges the hegemonic order, the gang's own style offers no tangible answers. Their vague, undefined rebellion is underlined when Johnny is asked what he is rebelling against and he replies: "Whad'ya got?" While Johnny's style is linked to his attempts to forge a more potent, dynamic masculinity than that of the man in the grey flannel suit, his pristine aesthetic pose, like the suit, suggests *in*action.

The film ultimately portrays the gang's attempts to escape emasculating hegemonic masculinity and forge a virile and viable alternative masculinity as futile. The film's obsessive use of phallic symbols underscores the gang's failed masculinity. For example, Johnny brandishes a small trophy depicting a man on a motorbike, which he often swings at groin height when he is walking around and attaches to his bike so that its stands erect as he is riding. When Chino, the leader of the rival gang the Beetles, takes the trophy from Johnny's bike and attaches it to his own, Johnny pushes Chino off his bike and takes back his trophy. Chino emphasises the statuette's significance when he complains sarcastically: "Oh, don't take that away from Chino. It's so beautiful. Chino needs it. It makes Chino feel like a big, strong man." Exchanges between Johnny and Kathy further reinforce that the trophy is Johnny's fetish, substituting as a phallic object. When Johnny presumptuously offers to give his trophy to Kathy when he first meets her, her response underlines the gravity of the offer and implicitly tells Johnny that she is not 'that kind of girl': "No, I can't do that. You won it. You have to get your name engraved

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[32] Steve Vineberg, Method Actors: Three Generations of an American Acting Style (New York: Schirmer Books, 1991), p.162

[33] Graham McCann, Rebel Males: Clift, Brando and Dean (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), p.16

on it or whatever you do. It's important to you. You don't give something away just like that – not unless you know a girl real well, and, well, liked her." Later, alone in the woods with Johnny with whom she is now better acquainted, Kathy highlights the sexual innuendo of Johnny's offer to 'give' his trophy to her by asking: "You were going to give me that trophy back there, will you give it to me now?... I just wanted to know if you still wanted to *give* it to me."

As a phallic symbol, Johnny uses the trophy to buttress and enhance his masculine credentials. Yet, the trophy is stolen; it rightfully belongs to someone else, and is therefore representative of *someone else's* phallus. As Chino astutely puts it when Johnny accuses him of stealing his trophy: "I didn't win it, sure, I just glebed it, but I glebed it off a guy who didn't win it either." Moreover, the trophy is clearly a consolation prize; it is, after all, a second place trophy. When the biker who stole the trophy for Johnny presents it to him, another biker complains: "What? Second place? You mean Johnny only won second place?" The thief replies: "What'ya mean? First place was two feet high!" In other words, first place is too much phallus to conceal beneath the masculine artifice the bikers have constructed. Furthermore, before the theft, the bikers disparage the trophies for being cheap and crass ("Are these real gold?" "Sure they're real gold… dipped").

The gang's motorbikes are also phallic symbols in the film, and, like Johnny's little statuette, they too emphasise the bikers' failure to construct a potent alternative masculinity. The bikers communicate their sexual attraction by making infantile 'revving' sounds, as if motorcycles were extensions of their sexual organs. Moreover, the bikers judge the masculine credentials of others on their ability to 'drag' and handle their motor vehicles. When an official reprimands them at the race track, one of the bikers challenges him to "drag Johnny for beers." When the official refuses, the biker calls him a "square" and brags about Johnny's ability on his bike. Yet the bikers themselves are often shown to lack control of the bike-phalluses between their legs. When the BRMC arrive in Wrightsville they "drag for beers." One of the bikers loses control of his bike at the starting line, and it flies out from between his legs, leaving him sprawled on the ground. Another biker skids into an on-coming car and sustains a broken leg, which, as the literary symbol for impotence or sexual dysfunction, further compromises his

masculine credentials. Even Johnny loses control of his bike at the end of the film after being hit with a tyre-iron, and his careening bike kills the old bartender.

A degree of gender ambiguity accompanies these bikers' failed attempts to construct a viable alternative masculinity. The bikers often slip in and out of feminine clothing and feminine roles. For example, at the bar, one of the bikers dances with a local girl, and when another biker asks to 'cut in', he 'cuts out' the girl and starts dancing with the other biker. Later, as some of the gang are loitering outside the hair salon, one of the BRMC emerges wearing a long blonde curly wig, and, affecting an effeminate voice, says: "That Mildred gives the craziest permanents." Other bikers leave the salon wearing industrial hair-dryers, while others break into a dress shop and try on dresses. Later, the bikers stage a mock wedding as one of the BRMC wears a wedding dress, and the bikers shower the "bride and groom" with trash rather than confetti, lampooning the conventions of heterosexual marriage. The bikers' playful gender ambiguity suggests that they hold a less staid and rigid conception of gender than mainstream society. In this sense, their gender play threatens hegemonic norms by upsetting supposedly 'normal' and 'natural' codes of dress and behaviour that legitimate gender difference and justify patriarchal dominance.

Yet, when viewed in the context of their failure to stabilise a coherent alternative masculine identity, the biker's gender ambiguity seems to emerge not from their confident mastery of gender identity but from their confusion about gender roles. No doubt, the bikers' image resonated so powerfully with the young because their failed attempt to construct a potent and virile alternative masculinity spoke so directly to the crisis of masculinity in the 1950s. The bikers' style indexed the contradictions and confusions that surrounded the era's gender norms, especially the failings of masculinity. The fractured form of masculinity that the bikers embodied at least presented a version of masculinity that was more open, and held more possibilities, than the man in the grey flannel suit. As Hebdige would put it, the bikers' subcultural response to the crisis was necessarily ambiguous; to its youthful audience, the film highlighted the problem by writing it in style, without offering tangible answers to the questions it raised. Yet the fact that they posed these questions with a sneering impertinence so seductive to young viewers was itself a major breach of the containment narrative.

The Cool Pose

Stylistic subcultures' responses to the hegemonic culture can be potent, despite being "essentially ambiguous." The pose best exemplifies spectacular subcultures' tendency to turn, as Hebdige puts it, "the fact of being under scrutiny into the pleasures of being watched."[34] The pose can take the form of standing on street corners, strolling in packs, leaning on walls and cars and on the back of motorbikes, and blocking streets, walkways and entrances. The pose is essentially display and, ideally, it should display difference; it should present a sight that requires a second look. In Hebdige's words, it turns "being looked at into an aggressive act."[35] The pose anticipates the gaze of surveillance and defiantly confronts it. By departing so radically from the normal and usual, stylistic subcultural posers present, as Hebdige puts it, a "temporary blockage" to the normal flow of hegemonic signifiers and expose the artificiality of these supposedly 'natural' signs.

The tacit understanding that appearance constituted a threat to the social order underpinned the pose. Representations of juvenile delinquency in public education films, making a clear link between clothing and behaviour, often portrayed leather-jacketed gangs of youth loitering on street corners with latent menace. Inevitably, these gangs' purposeless lingering leads them into anti-social behaviour, like smoking, and eventually crime.[36] A report on juvenile delinquency by Buffalo's Youth Board in 1957 made this link explicit. It showed a picture of a leather-clad boy on 'look-out' while his long-haired accomplices dressed in turned-up jeans and plaid shirts hot-wired a car. The caption read: "[For] Delinquency-prone youngsters whose respect for the law is marginal, idleness and corner lounging may have serious consequences. The street corner may become the rendezvous where amateur criminals plan an act of petty car theft, such as rifling the contents of a parked car."[37] This link between youth-style clothing, loitering and juvenile

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[34] Hebdige, "Posing…", p.86

[35] Ibid., p.85

[36] See the public education films "A Boy in Court" and "The Birth of Juvenile Delinquency" compiled on Teenage Confidential: Government Scare Films of the '40s and '50s (dir. Johnny Legend) Video: Rhino Home Video, 1987

[37] Graebner, "Containment," p.82

delinquency was widespread. As a result, many localities passed ordinances banning "corner lounging" and loitering; in the 1950s, by-laws that had traditionally targeted black people were now used against white juveniles.[38]

One of the most iconic purveyors of the pose was James Dean, whose 'look', enshrined in his Rebel Without A Cause role, defined the rebel pose for budding juvenile delinquents loitering on street corners everywhere. In promotional posters for the film, he is pictured standing slumped against a wall, hair greased in a quiff, wearing jeans, boots, and a white t-shirt underneath his red leather jacket. The shoulders are hunched, collar upturned, head bowed as he peers detachedly through 'hooded' eyes while smoking a cigarette. Although there is no hint of motion besides the curling smoke, there is subdued menace in the look. The scene is lit as if at night, with harsh light illuminating Dean's body, as if he has been caught in a police spotlight. In other words, the picture's perspective is that of surveillance. Dean's coolly defiant glare meets the surveying gaze, as if he expects to be seen, as if, rather than cowering or submitting, he is daring the gaze of officialdom to look at him.

James Dean's 'look' recalls the 'down look' that whites demanded that slaves adopt when in their presence. This look was supposed to signify deference on the part of the slave toward his or her social 'betters', and was but part of an elaborate etiquette system that included demeanour, gaze, gesture, stance and walk. The down look, however, did not guarantee the level of compliance that whites desired. As Shane White and Graham White discern, advertisements for runaway slaves emphasised that these looks were often riddled with ambiguity and resistance, as some slaves were described as having "roguish down looks" and "down impudent looks."[39] The "impudent" or "roguish" down look was a product of the inevitability of surveillance. Slaves were always subject to surveillance from their white masters and forced to affect gestures and expressions that signified their subservience and inferiority, such as avoiding eye contact, smiling broadly and hunching shoulders. The "down impudent look" subverted this surveillance by mimicking gestures of subservience and inferiority but inflecting them

[38] Graebner, Coming of Age, p.88

[39] Shane White and Graham White, Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1998), p.68-9

with defiance; a smirk rather than a smile, eyes rolled back rather than turned down. While James Dean may not have consciously appropriated or even known about the down look, his pose suggests that he not only identifies with the downtrodden who are inevitably the objects of surveillance, but that he is one of those himself; that, as a youth, he is an outsider and the inevitable object of surveillance.

Dean's and Brando's deliberate, rebellious poses were also inspired by the 'cool pose' that originated in black culture. Joel Dinerstein suggests that cool is the "ideal state of balance, a calm but engaged state of mind between the emotional poles of 'hot' (excited, aggressive, intense, hostile) and 'cold' (unfeeling, efficient, mechanistic) – in other words, a 'relaxed intensity'."[40] He argues that cool emerged as a widespread affective state within black culture in the 1930s. At this point two "strains of the African American historical experience converged…: first, a new impatience among blacks with the historical need to mask their feelings in front of whites; second, the fight for recognition of individual self-expression."[41] In contrast to the happy, smiling Sambo mask that slaves were forced to don to underscore their subservience to white masters, the cool mask refused to betray emotion. As LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) puts it, to "be cool was, in its most accessible meaning, to be calm, even unimpressed, by what horror the world might daily propose," such as the "deadeningly predictable mind of white America."[42] Performers like Miles Davis exemplified the cool mask, in that he affected a "chilly on-stage demeanor" indifferent to audience reaction.[43] Davis's cool refused to acquiesce to what white audiences traditionally demanded from black artists – to be 'entertained' by buffoonish, affable comic personas. Davis never spoke to his audience and would not even bow to applause, retaining his detached, "relaxed intensity" for the

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[40] Joel Dinerstein, "Lester Young and the Birth of Cool," in Gena Dagel Caponi (ed.), Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin' and Slam Dancing: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), p.241

[41] Ibid., p.242

[42] LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Blues People: Negro Music in White America (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1963), p.213

[43] Bertram D. Ashe, "On the Jazz Musician's Love/Hate Relationship with the Audience" in Gena Dagel Caponi (ed.), Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin' and Slam Dancing: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), p.280

duration of his appearance. He embodied the "new response to the white gaze of superiority," as Dinerstein puts it, which "was to drop the grinning black mask – the symbol that everything was all right – and cool the face."[44]

The cool mask also encompassed fluid, graceful movement that connoted control over one's body and emotional detachment from surrounding events. Dinerstein states:

> The 'mask of coolness' shows serenity of mind *and* mastery of the body: the cool performer thus shares with the community the joy of one's body, the pleasure one gets in contributing beauty and grace to an event, the skill in producing a distinctive rhythm that links up with other rhythms. The objective is to display a relaxed sense of control, to turn difficult physical acts into smooth, fluid, easy motion.[45]

The cool walk, then, merged this "smooth, fluid, easy motion" with a swagger that suggested control and mastery over not only the body but the existential *moment*. Regardless of the hostility or danger of the situation, the cool pose and walk signified grace under pressure, a complete command of one's emotions.

Both Dean and Brando clearly adopt the cool pose and walk in their performances. Many moments in The Wild One demonstrate Marlon Brando's application of the cool mask. For instance, early in the film, Brando's Johnny abides a policeman's demand that the BRMC leave the motorcycle race meeting, but he does so coolly, with a painstaking deliberate lack of speed that signifies his mastery of the moment. Strolling with his head held calmly and arrogantly back, his chin defiantly pointed toward the police officer, his shoulders loose and swaggering, and his facial expression coolly indifferent, Johnny leads his gang towards their bikes. Once mounted, Johnny pauses, calculatingly puts on his sunglasses ("perhaps the primary symbol of the cool mask"[46]), picks off an imaginary speck of dust, and finally starts his bike. Deliberately surveying the scene, Johnny motions to his gang with a small tilt of his head and they follow him as his bike kicks dust onto the policeman. Johnny personifies "a no-sweat attitude" and displays "poise in a world where one had no authority," prime components of cool.[47]

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[44] Dinerstein, p.262

[45] Ibid., p.255

[46] Ibid., p.251

[47] Ibid., p.262, 267

Brando's appropriation of the cool pose emanated from his fascination with and attraction to black culture. As Krin Gabbard notes, Brando grew up listening to jazz and blues music like Louis Armstrong and Bessie Smith; he had a fascination with dark-skinned women, studied at Katherine Dunham's School of Dance where 65 percent of the students were black and learned to play the bongos and congas from revered Haitian drum teacher Henri "Papa" Augustine.[48] Gabbard argues that this fascination with black culture inflected his theatrical and cinematic performances, particularly Stanley Kowalski in Streetcar Named Desire and Johnny in The Wild One. In the latter film, Gabbard suggests, Brando practically inhabits a surrogate black character, who speaks jive, listens to jazz music, moves to its rhythms, and projects a dangerous sexuality usually associated with the racial 'other'. Gabbard even suggests that the towns folk who hunt down Johnny at night is a "crypto-lynch mob": "Although no black faces appear in The Wild One, and although the term lynching is never part of the dialogue, the mob persecution of a man who walks and talks like a black man and who listens to bebop clearly recalls lynching, a well-reported and increasingly reviled phenomenon in Hollywood."[49] Moreover, when the state police captain finally sets Johnny free, a large picture of Abraham Lincoln, the "Great Emancipator," looms in the background.[50] (Of course, however reviled the phenomenon of lynching was in Hollywood, it was still loath to depict a black man being lynched by a white mob, and here the fact that the "lynching" is displaced – that the word is never mentioned and that it is a white man threatened by the angry mob – indicates Hollywood's reluctance to confront this issue overtly.) Dean's well-documented adoration for Brando, which included learning how to play the bongos, surely influenced his appropriation of the cool pose. The point is that, for Dean, Brando, and members of the youth culture who emulated them, the cool pose, appropriated from black culture, embodied a stylistic defiance to hegemonic adult culture.

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[48] Krin Gabbard, Black Magic: White Hollywood and African American Culture (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), p.33-4

[49] Ibid., p.46-7

[50] See Chapter Five for a discussion of the problems associated with the prevalent cultural tendency of white men to wish to identify with, copy and even inhabit black masculinity in the 1950s.

Zoot Suits: The Origins of 1950s Youth Culture Stylistic Rebellion

Zoot suit culture was crucial for transmitting the cool pose, fluid kinesis and rebellious sartorial styles to 1950s youths. Zoot suits were inextricably tied to the black jazz and hipster subcultures fomenting particularly in Harlem and Chicago and in Chicano pachuco subculture in Los Angeles in the 1940s. 'Zoot' referred to "something worn or performed in an extravagant style."[51] In hipster parlance, the zoot suit was "a killer-diller coat with a drape-shape, reat pleats and shoulders padded like a lunatic's cell."[52] The zoot suit was characterised by its exaggerated shape – wide shoulders, long drapes, baggy trousers tapering dramatically at the ankles – and bright colours. Fedora hats and jewellery, especially gold watch chains, were popular accessories.

Zoot suiters and 1950s teenagers shared similarities in their stylistic subversion and expression of autonomous identity through the cultivation of a particular aesthetic. Clothing was but a facet of both subcultures that encompassed music, attitude and even speech. Along with these subcultural elements, clothing was as an identity-affirming statement of being. Unlike the 1950s youth culture, though, the zoot suit was an emblem of ethnicity, a sartorial celebration of alienation and marginality from white culture and acquiescent immigrant culture. Zoot suiters faced much more violent reprisals than 1950s youths, primarily because of their perceived lack of patriotism in the context of World War Two, but due also in large measure to their racial status.

Typically, zoot suiters were black and Chicano youth who occupied liminal positions within America. They were generally the product of second generation migrant communities; of rural black families who had migrated from the Jim Crow South to northern urban areas in the 1920s and 30s and of Mexican families who had migrated predominantly to California, lured by the promise of better opportunities. The children of these families experienced the bitter betrayal of these promises through racism, poverty and violence. Alienated from both the rural traditions of their parents and the urban communities in which they found themselves, they were, as pachucos (Chicano zoot

[51] Stuart Cosgrove, "The Zoot Suit and Style Warfare" in History Workshop, 18 (Autumn, 1984), p.78

[52] Ibid.

suiters) saw themselves, "24-hour orphans,"[53] a misfit, alien presence. They often turned to petty crime as structural racism limited their employment prospects to unappealing menial occupations which were the station of their parents.

In this context, the zoot suit was a bold statement of being, a radical display of presence in a white-dominated society that sought to make these minorities invisible. It was also a means of distancing zoot suiters from the growing migrant populations that acceded to the demands of the war effort, namely the thousands of blacks who migrated to urban centres from rural areas in search of relatively well-paid war industry jobs and the thousands of farmers imported from Mexico under the 1942 Bracero Program to compensate for the labour shortage in agriculture. Both black and Chicano migrant populations swelled urban neighbourhoods, often incurring the ire of existing populations. For instance, approximately 1.2 million rural blacks left the South in the 1940s in search of industrial work. This was triple the rate of migration throughout the 1930s.[54] Within both black and Chicano populations there was hostility among established communities towards rural migrants whom they perceived as uncouth and backwards.[55]

Zoot suits were distancing devices to set these youths apart from both urban bourgeois and freshly migrated communities. Zoot suiters belonged to neither community. Black zoot suiters considered bourgeois blacks to be Uncle Toms, acquiescent to white cultural values and apologists for white racism, and rural migrants to be simple country hicks. Similarly, according to Joan Moore, pachuco gangs like the Polviados, who were based in San Fernando, "consciously set themselves apart from the rural Chicanos of Pacoima, Canoga Park, Van Nuys and other Valley barrios, whom they considered backward, square, 'farmers'."[56] As Bruce Tyler argues, inculcation into zoot suit culture

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[53] Ibid., p.80

[54] Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo, Rock n Roll is Here to Pay: The History and Politics of the Music Industry (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1977), p.28-9

[55] Bruce Tyler, "Black Jive and White Repression" in The Journal of Ethnic Studies 16, 4 (Winter 1989), p.41

[56] Quoted in Mauricio Mazon, The Zoot Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), p.5

involved a "re-education" of rural blacks to a combative urban consciousness.[57] Among those who "shed their rural folk culture for an urban one" were Malcolm X and future black Panthers leader Eldridge Cleaver. Both men were subject to the ridicule of zoot suited hipsters upon their migration from rural areas, and both were pressured into adopting a defiant racialised consciousness.

Recounting his days in a zoot suit, Malcolm X came to regard aspects of the style as pandering to white cultural and aesthetic standards. An example of this is his description of the 'process', a method of achieving the favoured zoot suiter hairstyle of the 'conk'. The 'conk' was short for 'kink no more', which meant that the hair would be straightened, usually dyed and then greased, combed so the sides were flat and the hair sat high on top. The 'process' included a formula made from eggs, potatoes and lye called congolene:

> from the big vaseline jar, [Shorty, Malcolm's friend who is administering the process] took a handful and massaged it hard all through my hair and into the scalp. He also thickly vaselined my neck, ears and forehead. "When I get to washing out your head, be sure to tell me anywhere you feel any little stinging," Shorty warned me, washing his hands, then pulling on the rubber gloves, and tying on his own rubber apron. "You always got to remember that any congolene left in burns a sore into your head."
>
> The congolene just felt warm when Shorty started combing it in. But then my head caught fire.
>
> I gritted my teeth and tried to pull the sides of the kitchen table together. The comb felt as if it was raking my skin off.
>
> My eyes watered, my nose was running. I couldn't stand it any longer; I bolted to the washbasin. I was cursing Shorty with every name I could think of when he got the spray going and started soap-lathering my head.[58]

Assessing this process from the prism of 1960s black radical activism, Malcolm sees a conk as a black man's way of looking "white" and an "emblem of his shame that he is black."[59] However, as Shane and Graham White, Stuart Cosgrove and Robin Kelley,

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[57] Tyler, p.41

[58] Malcolm X, with Alex Haley, The Autobiography of Malcolm X (New York: Garland Press, 1986), p.54

[59] Ibid., p.55-6. A haircut referred to as the 'conk' was popular among the black bourgeoisie at the same time as it was worn by black urban youths. It differed from youths' haircuts in two important ways: first, it could not be described as 'zoot' (that is, exaggerated in style). It was to a much larger extent a 'sensible' hair-straightening that allowed these blacks to imitate white hair that was combed close to the scalp. The second point of difference is that black youths' conks gained their subversive value in combination with the zoot suit; for black urban youths, the zoot suit necessitated a conk and vice versa (which means that when

among others, have argued, the zoot suiter's conk did not resemble white hairstyles; it was a uniquely black style with origins stretching back to Africa. White and White suggest that hair straightening techniques were important African customs that prepared hair to be styled and infused with spiritual symbolism. Although removed from the context of African spiritual ritual, such practices persevered in the New World. Hair was one of the few sites of free expression among slaves and functioned as a communal activity that bound slave communities together.[60] As Kobena Mercer puts it, "the conk did not copy anything and certainly not any of the prevailing white male hair-styles of the day… the nuances, inflections and accentuations introduced by artificial means of stylization emphasised difference." Further, "the political economy of the conk rested on its ambiguity, the way it 'played' with the given outline shapes of convention only to 'disturb' the norm and hence to institute a 'double take' demanding that you look twice."[61]

Similarly, zoot suits were hardly gauche attempts to mimic respectable white dress standards. They were not the equivalent of what John Berger describes as peasants' awkward internalisation of hegemonic dress sense. Berger points out that the typical suit was the invention of the English professional classes and was the emblem of the 'gentleman', an archetype that encapsulated the values endemic to this group. Peasants' spontaneous consent to these aesthetic values, he argues, was evidence of the hegemony of the ruling class:

> The working classes – but peasants were simpler and more naïve about it than workers – came to accept *as their own* certain standards of the class that ruled over them – in this case standards of chic and sartorial worthiness. At the same

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one invokes the zoot suit, one necessarily invokes the conk and vice versa). Members of the black bourgeoisie, however, wore their more modest conks with sensible suits that found favour according to white mainstream norms. As Kelly argues, the zoot suiter's conk "was a 'refusal' to look like either the dominant, stereotyped image of the Southern migrant or the black bourgeoisie, whose 'conks' were closer to mimicking white styles than those of the zoot suiters." Robin Kelley, Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class (New York: The Free Press, 1996), p.167. Malcolm X holds each manifestation up to the same criticism that they symbolise a betrayal of black society, while I would argue that one must differentiate between these types of conks.

[60] White and White, p.38-9, 171

[61] Kobena Mercer, "Black Hair/Style Politics" in Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Cornel West (eds), Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture (New York: The New York Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), p.259

> time their very acceptance of these standards, their very conforming to these norms which had nothing to do with either their own inheritance or their daily experience condemned them, within the system of those standards, to being always, and recognisably to the classes above them, second-rate, clumsy, uncouth, defensive. That indeed is to succumb to a cultural hegemony.[62]

The tragedy for Berger is that the labouring classes are not only doomed by their own fashion choices to be complicit in their subordination to the ruling classes but that they look clumsy and uncouth while doing so.

Such a charge could not be levelled against the zoot suit. Although it was indeed 'wrong' by hegemonic standards of restrained, sensible, non-demonstrative and patriotically stream-lined clothing, the extravagance and bravado with which the zoot suit was worn signified mastery, not inferiority. Indeed, that was the crux of its controversy; had it connoted 'clumsiness' and 'uncouthness' it would have generated no scandal at all. The problem with the zoot suit was that it was a symbolic refusal on the part of its wearers to be hemmed into dominant stereotypes of racial others; that is, that instead of confirming subordination, it was, as Cosgrove puts it, "a refusal: a subcultural gesture that refused to concede to the manners of subservience."[63] Zoot suits' hyper-masculine shapes – with wide shoulders, tapered waists and excessively baggy pants that implied that its wearers needed extra room below the groin – worked toward recuperating a sense of masculinity, autonomy and dignity. As Andrew Ross notes, the shape of the zoot suit coupled with the defiant attitude suggested that zoot suiters had "masculinity to spare."[64] Moreover, in a racist society that named them 'boy', zoot suiters obsessively called each other 'Man'.[65]

Zoot suiters avoided the hard labour expected of them as racial minorities. While blacks' station in the wartime economy was often as grunt soldier or labourer, and Mexicans' was as farmhand, zoot suiters refused to turn their bodies into instruments of

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[62] Berger, p.35

[63] Cosgrove, p.78

[64] Andrew Ross, No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture (New York: Routledge, 1989), p.83

[65] Robin Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South" in Journal of American History 80 (June 1993), p. 87

labour or cannon fodder. A regular job was called a 'slave' in the bop vocabulary.[66] Zoot suiters preferred to profit from illicit schemes on the periphery of the jazz scene, including drug dealing, gambling and prostitution. The zoot suit emblemised their refusal to abide dominant stereotypes of the racial other as lowly unskilled worker. In this sense, they redefined themselves primarily through leisure rather than work.[67]

Eschewing work for pleasure, zoot suiters were anathema to the domestic war effort. Much resentment was directed at these able-bodied men who had refused or avoided the draft (a favourite trick was to feign mental illness[68]). Moreover, their suits were flagrant abuses of wartime retrenchment. In March 1942, the War Production Board drew up regulations for "streamlined suits" in an effort to cut back 26 percent on the use of fabric.[69] This effectively outlawed the zoot suit and sent its production underground. The LA City Council considered whether to make wearing a "zoot suit with reat pleats" an illegal act within the city limits of LA.[70] Yet, bootlegged zoot suits continued to decorate youths, much to the chagrin of patriots who were rationing for the war effort.

In the eyes of white authority, zoot suiters' unwillingness to contribute to the war effort translated into a desire to sabotage America's fighting capabilities from within. By 1943, white authorities began systematically closing down jazz clubs, zoot suiters' primary trade, alleging that such clubs "were corrupting and exploiting soldiers and civilians by playing them jazz and selling them booze, drugs and sex that dissipated their health and morals."[71] Allegedly, jazz clubs, and by extension zoot suiters, were also to blame for the alarming rates both of venereal disease among servicemen and absenteeism at munitions factories.[72]

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[66] Kelley, Race Rebels, p.88

[67] Kelley, "'We Are Not'," p.86

[68] Tyler, p.34-5

[69] Cosgrove, p.80

[70] Ibid., p.88

[71] Tyler, p.48

[72] Ibid.

Most hostile to the zoot suiters were servicemen, who were disgusted that able-bodied racial others were, they perceived, flaunting their lack of patriotism. Their violent resentment spilled over during the 'zoot suit riots' of June 1943, where off-duty servicemen attacked mainly Chicano zoot suiters in LA. Attacks spread to San Diego, New York and Chicago, where white servicemen brutally set upon black youths. One New York newspaper described the common method of dealing with zoot suiters in 1943: "Procedure was standard: grab a zooter. Take off his pants and frock coat and tear them or burn them. Trim the 'Argentine Ducktail' haircut that goes with the screwy costume."[73] The riots inspired wild accusations aimed at zoot suiters, as a House UnAmerican Activities investigation assembled "to determine whether the present zoot-suit riots were sponsored by Nazi agencies attempting to spread disunity between the United States and Latin-American countries," because many who wore zoot suits were Latino.[74]

From Zoot Suits to 1950s Youth Culture

By the beginning of the 1950s, the zoot suit's meaning had shifted. It became dissociated from the jazz scene. In part, this was due to the violent riots of 1943 in Detroit, Harlem and LA which increased police surveillance of zoot suiters and deterred the zoot suiters' primary illicit trades (like drug dealing, gambling and pimping), forcing those who stayed out of jail into legitimate employment. It was also in part due to changes within the jazz scene. The ascendance of be-bop jazz relocated jazz from dance venues to coffee houses, and proponents of this style preferred the berets, crumpled suits, turtleneck sweaters, goatee beards and heavy-rimmed spectacles of hip pseudo-intelligentsia to the gloss of the zoot suiter.[75] Be-boppers began to view the zoot suit as indicative of a crude, clownish version of black masculinity that was antithetical to their intellectual pretensions.[76] The often sombre, intellectual atmosphere of be-bop

[73] Cosgrove, p.81

[74] Ibid., p87

[75] Eric Lott, "Double V, Double Time: Bebop's Politics of Style" in Callaloo, 11, 3 (1988), p.598

[76] Steve Chibnall, "Whistle and Zoot: The Changing Meaning of a Suit of Clothes" in History Workshop 20 (Autumn 1985), p.62

performance also spurned the jitterbugging zooted hipster. Increasingly, dance venues like the Savoy in New York were re-populated by rhythm and blues artists who had emerged from the swing jazz era, like Louis Jordan and Big Joe Turner. Rhythm and blues replaced jazz as the era's most popular dance music among the urban working class black community.

In turn, the dress of the patrons and the new rhythm and blues stars morphed from zoot suits to less uniformly cut but still extravagant styles. The flashy, colourful clothes of Wynonie Harris, Lloyd Price and other prominent rhythm and blues stars did not conform to the precise styles and cuts of 1940s zoot suits but still embodied the meaning of 'zoot' (something worn or performed in an extravagant style). By presenting their bodies as objects of pleasure rather than instruments of labour, these flashy derivatives of zoot suit clothes performed a similar function in the black community as zoot suits of the 1940s. These performers' clothes by no means elicited the outrage that zoot suits did during the war but their styles still courted controversy. In 1950s America, and especially the Jim Crow South, blacks were supposed to be invisible, only admissible in white society as subservient workers: porters, shoe-shiners, dishwashers and house servants, garbed in clothes that befit their occupation. Hence, some whites reviled the sight of these rhythm and blues performers and their fans who emulated them dressed ostentatiously for show – not for work – in garments that, by assaulting the onlooker with their brightness, emphasised blacks' presence in society.

Yet, some whites found these styles more desirable than detestable, as the rhythm and blues scene of the late 1940s and early 1950s began reaching white audiences in ways that the black swing jazz dance scene had not. The jazz scene of the 1930s and 40s often had a white contingent, and many whites donned zoot suits. But the difference was accessibility. Harlem's black dance hall the Savoy was unusual among black dance halls in attracting large white audiences; the esoteric customs of the jazzmen and zoot suiters were designed to discourage and alienate white patrons. Whites who frequented this scene, like musician Mezz Mezzrow, were self-proclaimed "voluntary negroes," a term

indicating their full immersion in the culture of the black hipster.[77] Voluntary negroes lived in black neighbourhoods, talked jive, played and listened to jazz, had black friends and usually had black girlfriends.

The rhythm and blues scene was not so closed to white patronage. Whites did not need to acquaint themselves with an entire arcane subculture to enjoy rhythm and blues.[78] This was due primarily to technological changes in the postwar era. Advances in communication technology, like the transistor radio, coupled with the economic boom, resulted in an explosion in radio ownership and radio stations. Many stations began catering to swelling urban black communities by playing rhythm and blues music, usually in 'dead' night slots.[79] White disc jockeys like Alan Freed in Cleveland and Dewey Phillips in Memphis, and black jockeys like Rufus Thomas in Memphis and Vernon Winslow in New Orleans played black rhythm and blues music on their radio shows in the late 1940s and early 1950s to audiences of all races. Freed, Phillips, Thomas and white rhythm and blues proponent Johnny Otis from Los Angeles promoted rhythm and blues package shows that often catered to integrated audiences.

These influential disc jockeys were vital to preserving the most exclusive and beguiling aspect of zoot suit culture and spreading it to 1950s youth: jive talk. In the 1940s, zoot suiters spoke in regionalised jive talk that was incomprehensible to outsiders. In 'Harlemese', for example, "I capped an underground rattler to the land of nod" meant "I took the subway to Broadway." "Dig this gate with the solid kicks and drape; he's solid tuitty" meant "Look at this man (alligator) with the good looking and expensive shoes and pants on; he's real boss (tuitty is 'boss' in Italian)."[80] Similarly, pachucos in LA developed their own slang that mixed Spanish, jive and pidgin English. The meanings

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[77] Gayle Wald, "Mezz Mezzrow and the Voluntary Negro Blues" in Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Vebel (eds), Race and the Subject of Maculinities (Durham: Durham University Press, 1997), p.117

[78] However, many white rhythm and blues followers did acquaint themselves with such knowledge and engage in similar racial transformation to the likes of Mezz Mezzrow, like Johnny Otis and Mike Stoller and Jerry Leiber. See Chapter Five.

[79] In radio parlance, 'dead' slots refer to times where few people are listening, and therefore when little advertising can be sold. These times are generally unprofitable and stations often devoted them to 'minority' broadcasting.

[80] Tyler, p.32

of certain words were also very fluid, depending on context and intonation, and jive phrases changed rapidly, meaning one had to stay engaged with the culture to keep up. One of the effects of this jargon was to exclude the uninitiated, which included the forces of white surveillance, for the language of the zoot suiter was ostensibly a separate language, an urban oral language that was indecipherable to outsiders.

The youth culture of the 1950s inherited many words that originated in jive: cool (meaning composed), groovy (good), cat (male), chick (female), kicks (shoes, or good times), square (naïve, socially awkward, conservative). Radio DJs were instrumental in disseminating this language. They added their own improvised phrases to the lexicon. Rufus Thomas, for example, used rhymes like "I'm young and loose and full of juice, I got the goose, so what's the use?"[81] The records these DJs played, from Little Richard's "Tutti Frutti" to Jackie Wilson's "Reet Petite," which was inspired by the zoot suiters' phrase for fine pants ("reet pleats") also added to the youth vocabulary. Seminal radio DJs, some of whose radio shows would be broadcast across several states on clear nights, obliterated geographical boundaries and engaged the burgeoning cognoscenti of adolescents who received an education in both rhythm and blues and black subculture. Teens then adopted those styles of speech as their own, embellishing and improvising upon them to the exclusion of unknowing adults.

Like the jive of the zoot suiters, youth culture jive provided young people with a sense of shared community and identity. Like the zoot suiters, male teenagers obsessively applied the epithet "Man" to refer to one another. To zoot suiters, this term was defiant; as Mercer puts it, "hep-cats of the cool world greeted each other as Man, systematically subverting the paternalistic interpellation – boy! – of the white master code, the voice of authority in the social text of the urban plantation."[82] To 1950s adolescents, the term was also defiant in that it evoked independence and power among a group seeking to assert its autonomy. To teens who felt constrained by age regulations – especially pertaining to measures, like curfews, aimed at curbing juvenile delinquency that targeted all young people – the use of 'Man' subverted the rationale of the 'adult master code'.

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[81] Nelson George, The Death of Rhythm and Blues (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1989), p.51

[82] Mercer, p.259

Jive also worked to buttress youth identity against the forces that attempted to infiltrate it - adult authorities and 'squares' (young people seemingly allied to adult cultural mores and values) – primarily because jive was indecipherable to outsiders. Indeed, jive often twisted conventional words into conveying oppositional meanings and values. As Mercer points out, in "jive talk, the very meanings of words are made uncertain and undecidable by self-conscious stylization which sends signifiers slipping and sliding over signifieds: bad means good, superbad means better."[83] Tom Wolfe's explanation of youth culture argot in his study of customised car culture demonstrates such a twisting of conventional terms:

> [Youth] use the words 'rotten', 'bad' and 'tough' in a very fey, ironic way. Often a particularly baroque and sleek custom car will be called a 'big, bad Merc' (for Mercury) or something like that. In this case, 'bad' means 'good' but it also retains some of the original meaning of 'bad'. The kids know that to adults, like their own parents, this car is going to look sinister and somehow like an assault on their style of life. Which it is. It's rebellion, which the parents don't go for – 'bad', which the kids *do* go for, 'bad' meaning 'good'.[84]

The dominant meaning is still attached to the term but inverted. This inversion of 'bad' rendered that which adults would regard as 'bad' as 'good', for it fit the young's purpose in rejecting adult values. Many of the more enduring jive terms, like 'far out' and 'out of sight', emphasised their distance and inaccessibility to adult comprehension. As Mailer emphasises, many jive terms connoted movement, like "go, groove, creep, flip, dig, swing," words that contrasted with the perceived inertia of mainstream culture, and in jive talk, there "is really no way to describe someone who does not move at all."[85] Like zoot suit jive, youth culture jive was constantly morphing as a means of slipping the comprehension of outsiders. A scene in the 1957 film High School Confidential emphasises this. A teacher attempts to integrate 'cool' slang like 'square' and 'doll' into her English lesson to emphasise how language changes over time, but her hip students ridicule her choice of words as hopelessly out of date: "All that old style jive you got

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[83] Ibid., p.261

[84] Tom Wolfe, The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby (London: Mayflower Books, 1968), p.83

[85] Mailer, p. 310-11

written up on the board is nowhere…. That stuff is strictly for the tinners who live around the block."[86]

Another stylistic element youth culture inherited from zoot suiters was the ducktail (also known as DA for duck's arse), conk or quiff hair-do. The purpose of this was undoubtedly to flaunt the 1950s convention of closely cropped, 'sensible' hair. The two most prominent symbols of patriarchal America, the bald eagle and the similarly shiny-headed Dwight Eisenhower, were implicitly mocked in the long greasy locks of 1950s youths' DAs. Elvis Presley in particular seemed, to many young people, to embody a refusal of America's hairless wisdom for, unlike his imitators whose locks were often sculpted rigidly on their heads with grease that tended to set hair in place, strands of Elvis's hair frenetically darted around his forehead, drawing attention to his unconventional locks. As Karal Ann Marling argues, part of the excitement engendered in Elvis's early television performances was the fact that his hair was always in motion, as the stationary camera emphasised "the trajectory of the swinging, bristling, dangling locks of way-too-long hair."[87]

When Elvis entered the army in 1958, his hair was shorn as part of his induction. Photos of military hairdressers shearing Elvis's head and Elvis admiring his new hairdo littered newspapers. The media fixated upon this event more than any other part of the induction for its symbolic value; the cutting of his hair, more than his participation in the armed services, seemed to indicate his acquiescence to hegemonic ideals and the end of his role as a figurehead of youthful rebellion. Coupled with this was his substitution of extravagantly cut two-tone suits for army fatigues.

Part of the reason that the transformation of Presley's style received such frenzied media coverage was that style was such a potent element of youth culture's rebellion. Through style, the youth culture both aggressively differentiated itself from adult culture and challenged the hegemony of 'consensus society' by embracing the culture of those who were excluded from this 'consensus', namely working class blacks and whites. As a

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[86] High School Confidential. Dir. Jack Arnold. Per. Russ Tamblyn, Mamie van Doran, John Drew Barrymore. Republic Pictures, 1958.

[87] Marling, p.169

working class white who feted rhythm and blues stars and actors like Brando and Dean[88], Presley epitomised the stylistic rebellion of the youth culture, which made his stylistic transformation at his induction so significant. In a sense, the reduction of Presley's threat through the modification of his style also mirrored a tactic that adult officialdom was increasingly utilising to fight against juvenile delinquency.

In the early 1950s, attempts to curb juvenile delinquency were anything but subtle. Violence was often overtly advocated as the solution to the juvenile delinquency problem. For example, while enforcing Buffalo's 1953 ordinance against street corner lounging, policeman Captain McNamara labelled such loiterers "candy-kitchen cake-eaters" and urged: "Bring some of these adolescent apes into the station and don't treat them gently. These punks have more respect for a cop's night stick than for the entire Code of Criminal Procedure."[89] However, a solution that was the brain-child of Buffalo Public School Associate Superintendent Dr Joseph E Manch would gain much more traction and nationwide publicity for its more sophisticated methods of battling juvenile delinquency: a dress code named Dress Right.

Counteracting Youth Culture Rebellion By Modifying Style

Buffalo officialdom had long perceived a link between behaviour and dress. Police Lieutenant Richard V. Carnival, head of Buffalo's youth bureau insisted that all gang members wore uniforms of high cut motorcycle boots, blue jeans, jackets and 'duck back' haircuts, even though he could not name a single gang.[90] Manch noted that there "seemed to be a rather close relationship between the way boys and girls dressed and the way they behaved," stressing that, in his experience, delinquents charged with "serious misconduct were often dressed in extreme or bizarre fashion or rather sloppily, wearing soiled dungarees and T-shirts or sweat shirts." In 1955, Manch moved to attack the

[88] Chapter Five details Presley's appropriation of black culture in more depth. Presley boasted that, as an usher at his local movie theatre, he memorised scenes from The Wild One and Rebel Without a Cause, making a detailed "study" of Brando and Dean. Peter Guralnick, Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley (London: Abacus, 1994), p.323-4

[89] Graebner, Coming of Age, p.89

[90] Graebner, "Containment," p.90

behaviour by modifying the dress. Rather than imposing a dress code unilaterally, Manch enlisted the assistance of the Inter-High School Student Council, a student body he had assembled a year prior to tackle issues pertaining to youth. This body consisted of two representatives from each of Buffalo's secondary schools who, as Manch described them, "were accepted as leaders by their peers." On Manch's urging, the body devised a code that met with Manch's standards and the Dress Right code was ready to be unveiled late 1955.[91]

For boys, the code barred soiled clothing, T-shirts and sweat shirts, as well as prohibiting "extreme" footwear like motorcycle boots. It recommended "conservative" sports shirts and ties with suit jackets or sports coats displaying affiliation to legitimate and socially responsible organisations, in contrast to the gang patches sewn into motorcycle jackets that were associated with juvenile delinquency. The code urged that "all recommended wear for girls should fit appropriately and modestly." V-neck sweaters without a blouse were "not recommended," nor were any overtly sexualised clothing.[92] The code also advised girls against androgynous styles. One advertisement for the benefits of the Dress Right campaign showed two shots of the same girl. The 'before' shot shows a supposed delinquent girl sullenly glaring at the camera, dressed in jeans, motorcycle boots and a gang-style jacket that has an "I Like Elvis" badge (mocking "I like Ike," the popular campaign slogan of President Eisenhower) pinned to it. The 'after' shot has the same girl smiling warmly at the camera dressed in matronly long dress, demure blouse and sensible shoes. The caption reads: "Bejeaned girls behave better… when they're in ladylike dress."[93]

By Manch's design, the application of the code was entirely voluntary. Its recommendations were spread through pamphlets, school newspaper editorials, assemblies and posters. One school invited students to survey their appearance by placing a full length mirror emblazoned with the question "Are You Satisfied?" at the head of a stairway. At another school, more coercive methods were used, as boys without ties were

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[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid., p.90-1

[93] Graebner, Coming of Age, p.102

forced to rent garish ties from the principal at the charge of two cents a day. During a review at the end of 1957, principals reported that the code had been completely effective in improving dress standards and somewhat effective in promoting good behaviour. They had, however, still found some opposition toward the code among small groups of students despite the code emanating from a student body rather than school administrators. Regardless, Dress Right was widely hailed in the media as a significant weapon in the war against juvenile delinquency, and many schools across the nation either adopted it or fashioned their own methods of social engineering based on this utilisation of peer group authority.[94]

As William Graebner points out, as a weapon against juvenile delinquency, Dress Right was largely ineffective. This was because its focus was not in modifying the behaviour or dress of those most prone to juvenile delinquency, but to retain the good dress habits of those who were not considered immediately at risk. The perception was that juvenile delinquency originated among the impoverished and under-educated, namely black communities and white working class and poor neighbourhoods. Authorities perceived an epidemic of juvenile delinquency when white middle class teenagers began adopting the habits, attitudes and styles of black and working class youth in the early 1950s. Constructing the youth culture through the rhetoric of containment, they concluded that juvenile delinquency was spreading from these poorer neighbourhoods into more affluent ones like an infection; that too much contact between 'healthy' middle class teenagers and adolescents 'diseased' by juvenile delinquency was causing lawlessness and anti-authoritarianism to spread.

This logic that justified Dress Right bore many of the hallmarks of containment culture. That Dress Right ratified the dress habits of the white middle class while stigmatising black and working class styles served to quarantine one group from the other. Before the implementation of Dress Right, Buffalo school authorities limited casual contact between these groups, which was not easy in an integrated school system that had to deal with increasing numbers of socially diverse attendees in the postwar period. Although schools in the area were supposedly integrated, white working class youths were encouraged almost exclusively into vocational schools where they learned skills for

[94] Graebner. "Containment," p.92-3

working class occupations, while all other youths were accepted into 'academic' schools. Black students were stationed into the latter primarily to keep them out of the trades, and even at academic schools they were usually segregated from white students because they were customarily placed on slower "tracks."[95] By implementing dress codes at youth clubs and at social events like dances and sock hops, adult authorities were able to reduce the potential for inter-class and interracial co-mingling outside of school, too. Yet, the fact that class and race differences were exploited as a means to contain juvenile delinquency sat uneasily alongside proclamations of a racially harmonious and classless society.

That the language and rationale of class and racial separation was invoked at all is testament to young people's success in exposing some of the hypocrisies of containment culture. Another measure of teenagers' success is in the methodology that was employed to counter their stylistic rebellion. Unlike the zoot suiters, who suffered violence, police harassment and legislation against their style of clothes, the young encountered a very benign voluntary dress code in Dress Right. To an extent, this is an unfair comparison, because zoot suiters' victimisation was in large part due to their race and ethnicity rather than exclusively their clothes. But the fact that Dress Right was designed and administered by adolescents themselves, and that in Manch's view it had to be the product of the young to have any chance of succeeding, was at least in some measure a victory for youth's battle to gain autonomy from adult control. It was a concession on the part of adults that peer group authority, rather than adult authority, was the only means of influencing teenagers' tastes and opinions.

However, the ease with which adult authority utilised peer group authority to cleave the youth culture shows how tenuous and limited notions of a coherent 'youth culture' are. The youth culture was not invested in a cohesive political project. Rather, the rebellion of teenagers was motivated by a desire for greater autonomy, and this autonomy tended to be less collective than individual. The young people who cooperated with Manch to design the Dress Right code, for example, probably regarded their input more as a sign of their individual enfranchisement and agency rather than group cooptation by adult authority.

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[95] Graebner, Coming of Age, p.103

Yet, ultimately, Dress Right did little to curb either juvenile delinquency or rebellious elements of the youth culture, instead confirming the potency of stylistic subversion. Appropriating both subversive tactics and specific sartorial styles from black subcultures, young people effectively evaded the comprehension of adults and carved space in which to express a distinctive 'youth culture'. As later chapters will emphasise, young whites' appropriation of black culture to express their cultural autonomy was inherently problematic and implicitly racist, but it was ultimately successful in establishing the youth culture's difference from the parent culture and exposing some of the hypocrisies of containment culture.

Dress Right managed to insulate some middle class white teenagers from class and racial others, but only temporarily. Beyond the adult-supervised sock hop and after-school club, these middle class white teens were inevitably exposed to elements of the youth culture that Dress Right was designed to exclude. Dress Right could not deter these well-dressed young people from venturing, for example, from the supervised after-school club to the comparatively anarchic drive-in movie theatre. At the drive-in, adolescents, no matter how demurely dressed, were likely to fondle their dates and cheer the jeans and t-shirt-clad delinquents of the main feature, engaging in precisely the kind of behaviour that Dress Right's architects wished to discourage.

Chapter 3

Distraction in the "Passion Pits": Youth Films, Spectatorship and the Drive-In Theatre

"I've never seen a film all the way through. I've always just seen bits." – Jean-Luc Godard[1]

In the 1955 film Blackboard Jungle novice teacher Richard Dadier (played by Glenn Ford) attempts to connect with his tough class at North Manual Arts High School by showing them an animated cartoon version of "Jack and the Beanstalk." Having rejected Dadier's earlier attempts to win them over through gadgetry when he brought a tape recorder to class, and then destroyed the prized jazz record collection of another teacher who tried to 'reach' them, the class is unexpectedly stimulated by the film. Encouraged, Dadier leads a discussion of the film that emphasises core values he is trying to instil in his wayward class: moral righteousness; overcoming adversity; loyalty to patriarchal authority. Dadier urges his class to identify with Jack, but only on specific terms; that Jack has slain the giant not because the giant is physically *different* but because the giant killed Jack's father years earlier. He emphasises that Jack defeats the giant and secures his future by procuring the harp and the golden goose because he surmounts the obstacles facing him, like poverty and a bad family background. Jack's actions are justifiable because he shows his loyalty by avenging his father's death.

Yet, Dadier cannot dictate the meaning of the cartoon to his students, as their divergent readings of "Jack and the Beanstalk" show. One student, Gregory (Sydney Poitier), challenges Dadier's reading. He is reluctant to identify with Jack, disdaining Jack's sale of the family cow for a "mess of beans." As a black male living in racist white America in the 1950s, where lynching was still practised in the South, Gregory also sympathises with the giant as a possible victim of extra-legal violence, for Jack kills without proof, or even knowledge, that the giant murdered his father. Dadier asks whether Gregory would support Jack's actions if the giant's guilt was proven, and

[1] Quoted in Nemonie Craven Roderick, "An Exhibition Like Any Other," Sight and Sound, v.16, no.7 (July 2006), p.9

Gregory reluctantly agrees to accept Jack as a laudable character, but stresses that "I think at least the giant deserved a trial."

However, the student who most frustrates Dadier's overtures is Artie West (Vic Morrow). Earlier, West, the ring leader of the juvenile delinquent gang, terrorised teachers and orchestrated an anonymous ambush and beating of Dadier. In class, West dismisses the film as "a phony," seeing it as a cheap gimmick on Dadier's part to win over a hostile class. He then offers his own interpretation of the film, agreeing with Dadier to identify with Jack, but only because, to him, the film demonstrates that "crime pays." He states that he admires Jack for stealing and murdering and getting away with it. Ironically, West takes the viewing position Dadier encourages, but for all the wrong reasons.[2]

Echoing Dadier's attempts to steer his students' reading of "Jack and the Beanstalk" is Blackboard Jungle's preface:

> We, in the United States, are fortunate to have a school system that is a tribute to our communities and to our faith in American youth. Today we are concerned with juvenile delinquency – its causes – and its effects. We are especially concerned when this delinquency boils over into our schools. The scenes and incidents here are fictional. However, we believe that public awareness is a first step toward a remedy for any problem. It is in this spirit and with this faith that BLACKBOARD JUNGLE was produced.

Like Dadier's attempts to frame "Jack and the Beanstalk" according to his reading, the film's preface encourages the viewer to identify not with the youth who are prone to delinquency, but with Dadier, whose main goal is to remedy the problem of juvenile delinquency. The preface situates, in other words, youth as the targets of the viewer's surveillance and analysis. It invites the viewer to occupy the perspective of the 'community', the mythological amalgam that represents the interests of the 'concerned public', and judge these delinquent young as outside threats to that formation.

Yet, like Dadier's insistent reading of "Jack and the Beanstalk," the "spirit and faith" with which Blackboard Jungle was produced did not guarantee that viewers would position themselves as 'concerned citizens' and identify with Dadier's attempts to combat

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[2] Blackboard Jungle. Dir. Richard Brooks. Perf. Glenn Ford, Vic Morrow, Sydney Poitier. MGM, 1955. This discussion was informed by Leerom Medovoi, "Reading the Blackboard: Youth, Masculinity, and Racial Cross-Identification" in Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel (eds), Race and the Subject of Masculinities (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), p.150-3

juvenile delinquency. In a glaring contradiction to their general characterisation of young viewers as passive dupes, the Senate Subcommittee's investigation into the relationship between motion pictures and juvenile delinquency acknowledged this:

> While the committee recognizes and appreciates the artistic excellence of [Blackboard Jungle], it feels that there are valid reasons for concluding that the film will have effects on youth other than the beneficial ones described by its producers. It is felt that many of the type of delinquents portrayed in this picture will derive satisfaction, support, and sanction from having made society sit up and take notice of them. Although the tough individual portrayed by Artie West is used to show the crime-does-not-pay requirement by the end of the film, even the producer, Dore Schary, agreed that the type of individual portrayed by Artie West upon viewing this film will in no way receive the message purportedly presented in the picture and would identify with him no matter what the outcome of the film.[3]

Neither the committee nor the filmmakers could control the reception of the film. As the committee predicted, despite the framing of the film which encouraged identification with Dadier, many teenagers identified with Artie West. Scenes of Artie challenging Dadier's authority, ambushing Dadier in an alley and destroying another teacher's record collection were evidently popular among young people. In Rochester, New York, one newspaper reported that "young hoodlums cheered the beatings and methods of terror inflicted upon a teacher by a gang of boys" in the film.[4] Vandalism, including the slashing of theatre seats, and street fights often followed screenings. In Memphis, the 14 year old ringleader of a group of teenage girls who burnt down a barn admitted that she got the idea after seeing an adults-only screening of Blackboard Jungle. She told reporters: "We wanted to be tough like those kids in that picture."[5]

Blackboard Jungle inflamed hysteria about juvenile delinquency and provoked further controversy in 1955 when Clare Booth Luce, the US Ambassador to Italy, forced its withdrawal from the Venice Film Festival because she feared the film could damage America's international reputation. Similarly, the American Legion voted Blackboard

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[3] U.S. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, Motion Pictures And Juvenile Delinquency, Interim Report to the Committee on the Judiciary, 84th Cong., 2nd sess., 1956, p.46-7

[4] James Gilbert, A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.184

[5] Medovoi, p.149

Jungle the "movie that hurt America most in foreign countries in 1955." Among those to denounce the film were The National Congress of Parents and Teachers, the Girl Scouts, the American Association of University Women and even the Teenage Division of the Labor Youth League (a communist organisation).[6] Los Angeles Times columnist Phillip Scheuer warned that the film would prove damaging to American interests abroad, "particularly if it ever fell into Communist hands."[7]

Yet, Blackboard Jungle was not universally condemned and had some prominent and surprising advocates. Screen Actors Guild president Ronald Reagan, who had been a 'friendly' witness during the HUAC investigations of Hollywood in 1947, testified on the film's behalf to the Senate subcommittee. Arguing against calls to censor the film, Reagan strongly rebuked what he saw as attempts to "develop an entire generation that is going to grow up taking it for granted that it is all right for someone to tell them what they can see and hear from a motion-picture screen."[8] He added that he admired Dadier's character, seeing the depiction as "a great tribute to a group of persons who seldom get much credit – the schoolteachers of the country," and felt that any "juvenile seeing [the film] would have a feeling of disgust for the bad boy [Artie West]."[9]

The debate over Blackboard Jungle accentuated a crisis within the film industry. Despite, or perhaps because of, the controversy surrounding the film, it was a wild commercial success at a time when Hollywood audiences were dwindling and studios were facing bankruptcy. As we will see, the decline in audience was partly due to the timidity of Hollywood to confront controversial or provocative subject matter under the surveillance of the Production Code Office and the threat of further HUAC investigations. Films comprised a central part of America's domestic and international propaganda campaign to normalise and disseminate democratic and capitalist ideology during the Cold War. America's concern over its public relations rivalry with the Soviet Union in part motivated these measures to contain the sexual, criminal and political content of

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[6] Gilbert, p.185

[7] Mark McGee and R. J. Robertson, The J.D. Films: Juvenile Delinquency in the Movies (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1982), p.30

[8] U.S. Congress, Motion Pictures, p.52

[9] McGee and Robertson, p.46-7

films. Ironically, this very effort at containment compromised the profitability and viability of the industry that was so pivotal to America's Cold War effort.

Films like Blackboard Jungle, which were commercially successful yet potentially undermined America's image internationally by challenging notions of a harmonious society free from social strife. As well, the controversy surrounding such films underlined the incompatibility and non-sustainability of domestic containment with liberal capitalism. Counter-subversive forces battled to expel 'un-American radicals' from Hollywood to prevent them spreading, in Michael Rogin's words, their "radioactive ideas."[10] This scared studios and filmmakers into conservative productions. Yet, these prohibitions on subject matter constrained Hollywood's attempts to entice new audiences and establish new markets for its films.

Filmmakers, exhibitors and distributors resolved this dilemma by increasingly pushing the boundaries of the Production Code throughout the 1950s, eventually eroding its influence by the early 1960s. Independent studios on the periphery of Hollywood also increasingly catered to youth audiences as they recognised that by the middle of the 1950s, teenagers not only comprised the largest segment of the film audience, but also the most influential; the youth audience often determined the success or failure of a film. Although not at the forefront of challenging the Production Code, films specifically produced for the youth audience capitalised on the expanding range of permissible content and the gradual erosion of the Code. For the young, the film industry's courtship reinforced the sense of the youth culture as an autonomous group separate from adults. The films targeted specifically at youth underscored this too; even the films that demonised juvenile delinquents emphasised youth's threat to adults, their power to upset, disrupt and discomfit.

Young people's celebration of the demonised juvenile delinquent, who is obligatorily punished in accordance with the Production Code at the conclusion of each portrayal, suggested the futility of attempts at containment. Blackboard Jungle's portrayal of unredeemable psychopath Artie West inspired many similar characterisations in independent film companies' depiction of juvenile delinquency, suggesting the degree to

[10] Michael Rogin, Ronald Reagan, the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987)

which youth audiences celebrated and cheered these delinquents, in the words of the subcommittee, "no matter what the outcome of the film."

That teenagers celebrated these demonised and chastised juvenile delinquents demonstrates that the audience's reading often differed from that which the film text intended. As Stuart Hall argues in his influential paper "Encoding, Decoding," for an intelligible communication to take place, a text is *en*coded by its authors with an intended meaning but then must be *de*coded by its audience, and this decoding can differ radically from the text's intended ideological effects. A text's decoding is always related to – though not necessarily determined by – not only the events depicted on screen, but also the viewer's social position; that is, the viewer's proximity to the ideological interests that the text's "preferred meanings" serve.[11]

In a subsequent work, Hall warns that "our personalities are not at all as we imagine them, as sort of unified boxes, but are full of very contradictory elements" and refers to "the maelstrom of potential ideological subjects that we are."[12] Similarly, the youth culture was riven with axes of social difference like class, race, gender, religion, ethnicity and regionalism that warn us against conceiving of all youths inhabiting a "sort of unified box" and sharing subjectivities that produced stable, predictable and uniform readings. Young people did not necessarily hold common opinions or attitudes, and within individual youngsters, there were no doubt "contradictory elements," some that do not correspond to accepted notions – and therefore problematise analyses – of the 'youth culture'. Even though someone might be a teenager, for example, they may not regard age as the primary defining feature of their identity, or it may be one among many defining elements and co-exist with potentially contradictory elements. A spectator might well view a film from various subject positions, and oscillate between subjectivities within a single viewing experience.

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[11] Hall acknowledges: "Of course, there will always be private, individual, variant readings." But he stresses "encoding will have the effect of constructing some of the limits and parameters within which decoding will operate. If there were no limits, audiences could simply read whatever they liked into any message. No doubt some total misunderstandings of this kind do exist. But the vast range must contain *some* degree of reciprocity between encoding and decoding moments, otherwise we could not speak of an effective communication at all." Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," in Simon During (ed.), The Cultural Studies Reader (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.100-3

[12] Quoted in John Fiske, Television Culture (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p.67

An examination of 1950s youth culture suggests that the immediate viewing context is vital to accentuating or even inflecting both the text's "preferred meanings" and the viewer's social position. For the youth culture the immediate viewing context was commonly the drive-in movie theatre. Both the drive-in viewing environment and the films produced specifically for young spectators in this environment appealed primarily to young viewers' sense of themselves as part of the distinct youth culture. Thus, while youthful viewers were most likely awash in "the maelstrom of potential ideological subject[ivities]" that Hall describes, drive-ins encouraged teenagers to subordinate the "contradictory elements" of their personalities that aligned with adults and embrace their identities as 'youth'.

Drive-ins encouraged a 'distracted' form of spectatorship, which elicited more interactive and less reverent responses to films than traditional indoor theatres. 'Distracted' spectatorship facilitated young people's creative readings of films in ways that defied the prescriptions of the Production Code. In their readings, young audiences applied their own tastes and aesthetic values that were antithetical to adult values. As teenagers' appropriation of the drive-in shows, the youth culture fused around creative consumption of filmic texts and commercial spaces, exploiting the contradictions endemic in Cold War America's merger of containment ideology and consumer capitalism in order to assert an autonomous youth cultural identity.

The Production Code and the Imperilled Film Industry

The Production Code that prescribed the rigid limits of permissible film content in the Cold War era initially emerged as the film industry's concession to the forces of censorship. Yet, the Production Code, and the various attempts at censorship that preceded it, showed that these efforts to contain meaning at the level of the text are at best ineffective and at worst damaging to the film industry, as they were during the 1950s.

Typically, advocates of film censorship have failed to recognise the spectator as an active agent in the semiotic process, conceiving instead passive viewers at the mercy of the moving image. For example, the Supreme Court handed down a unanimous verdict in Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio in 1915, denying the

motion picture industry the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech and press on the grounds that films

> may be used for evil, and against that possibility the stature was enacted…. [Motion pictures] take their attraction from the general interest, however eager and wholesome it may be, in their subjects, but prurient interest may be excited and appealed to…. It cannot be put out of view that the exhibition of moving pictures is a business pure and simple, originated and conducted for profit, like other spectacles, not to be regarded… we think, as part of the press of this country or as organs of public opinion. They are mere representations of events, of ideas and sentiments published and known, vivid, useful and entertaining no doubt, but, as we have said, capable of evil, having the power for it, the greater because of the attractiveness and manner of exhibition.[13]

The Supreme Court most feared films' influence over immigrant working class audiences. Morality groups who campaigned for the regulation of filmic content and viewing conditions also expressed concern for the plight of immigrant working class audiences, who in their naivety and gormless astonishment at the moving picture, campaigners felt, were most susceptible to the potential "evil" that films disseminated. It was this conviction that films had a unique and endemic capacity for evil that ensured that motion pictures remained "the only medium of communication ever subjected to systematic legal prior restraint in the history of the United States" until the Paramount decision in 1948, when the Supreme Court proclaimed that the freedom of films was protected under the First Amendment.[14]

In part to mitigate film's perceived potential for "evil" and in part to fend off morality groups, the film industry itself instituted a Film Production Code in 1930. The Code was designed to placate moral groups like the Catholic National Legion of Decency, who threatened to boycott Hollywood's tawdry fare. Throughout the 1920s, Hollywood had largely ignored calls to moderate the content of its films, but, fearing dwindling profits in the wake of the Depression, adopted the Code in the 1930s more as a public

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[13] Quoted in Garth Jowett, "'A Significant Medium for the Communication of Ideas: The Miracle Decision and the Decline of Motion Picture Censorship, 1952-1968" in Francis G. Couvares (ed.), Movie Censorship and American Culture (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), p.259-60

[14] Ibid., p.260-1; Melvyn Stokes, "Introduction: Historical Hollywood Spectatorship" in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (eds), Hollywood Spectatorship: Changing Perceptions of Cinema Audiences (London: British Film Institute, 2001), p.3

relations device than an enforceable doctrine.[15] This changed in 1934 when an office was established to allay threats of federal censorship. This office, known as the Breen Office after its head Joseph Breen, administered the Code to the letter between 1934 and 1954.[16] Every script of every film made in Hollywood needed Code Office approval before it went into production, for without approval films risked expensive wrangling with state and city censorship boards.

Initially, the Code Office scrutinised predominantly sexual and moral content. Stringent rules restricted subject matter pertaining to the depiction of sex and crime in particular. The founding principle of the Code was that a film should not "lower the moral standards of those who see it."[17] To the Code Office, this forbade even moral ambiguity, for no "plot should be so constructed as to leave the question of *right or wrong in doubt or fogged*."[18] To this end, the presentation of crime could not "throw sympathy with the criminal as against the law, nor with the crime against those who must punish it."[19] The Code also forbade detailed description of criminal acts, like theft, murder, arson, safe-cracking and smuggling lest they inspire copy-cat crimes. The depiction of drug trafficking was completely prohibited, and the Code specified that the "existence of the trade should not be brought to the attention of audiences." Ironically, the Code would have banned "Jack and the Beanstalk" according to Dadier's reading, for killing "for revenge should not be justified, ie., the hero should not take justice into his own hands in such a way as to make his killings seem justified."[20] In the depiction of sex, sex perversion, "white slavery," miscegenation, sex hygiene, venereal disease, nudity and

[15] Thomas Doherty, Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema 1930-1934, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p.8

[16] Ibid., p.319-21

[17] Ibid., p.361

[18] Ibid., p.352

[19] Ibid., p.351

[20] Ibid., p.355-6

"indecent or undue exposure" were all banned, while adultery, scenes of passion and seduction could only be presented under very strict conditions.[21]

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, in the wake of the Red Scare and the Hollywood Ten trial, the Code Office increasingly censured 'un-American' political content. The Code proscribed criticism of American social, legal and political institutions. In addition to Code Office vigilance, industry pressure dissuaded 'message' films with 'social' content (in other words, films with Marxist or left-leaning politics) and further limited the range of permissible film content. Following the Hollywood Ten trial, prominent writers and directors were blacklisted for former association with Communists, which caused filmmakers to be wary of making 'political' films. Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) president Eric Johnston set the tone for acceptable film content under his administration in 1948 when he announced during his inauguration speech: "We'll have no more Grapes of Wrath, we'll have no more Tobacco Roads. We'll have no more films that show the seamy side of American life. We'll have no pictures that deal with labor strikes. We'll have no pictures that deal with the banker as villain."[22] To ensure this, Johnston combined with Screen Actors Guild president Ronald Reagan and Roy Brewer, head of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, to distribute a new film code, A Screen Guide for Americans, written by arch-conservative novelist Ayn Rand. Rand's code reflected the era's version of 'patriotic' ideology: the "nobility" of the "little people" was labelled the "drooling of weaklings," and banner headlines preached "Don't Smear the Free Enterprise System," "Don't Deify the Common Man," "Don't Show That Poverty Is a Virtue… and Failure Is Noble."[23]

By the mid-1950s, these constrictions on subject matter had become troublesome for the film industry. Although the industry had experienced a financial boom in 1934

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[21] Ibid., p.362-3

[22] Lary May, "Movie Star Politics: The Screen Actors' Guild, Cultural Conversion, and the Hollywood Red Scare" in Lary May (ed.), Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p.145

[23] Ibid.

when the Code Office was established[24], the restrictions seemed to be adversely affecting attendance in the 1950s. Box office receipts, which had been rising since 1934, fell dramatically from 1948, the year of the first HUAC investigations in Hollywood, and stayed low throughout the 1950s. Traditionally, this decline is most often attributed to the baby boom and the rise of television. Lary May, however, persuasively argues that the baby boom began earlier, as early as 1941, and not until 1950 did even ten percent of American families have televisions. He concludes that the decline is more attributable to the "Hollywood crusaders," who "destroyed the appeal of modern popular culture" and "blacklisted their most popular writers and performers, pressured filmmakers to alter film plots, and prevented the distribution of 'undesirable works'."[25]

Another common explanation for the decline of the film industry in this period is the 1948 Paramount Decision that deemed major studios' monopoly over the industry illegal. Until this ruling, Paramount, MGM, Warner Brothers, Fox and RKO were vertically integrated, meaning they controlled film production, distribution and exhibition. The Paramount Decision forced the studios to divest their interests in exhibition, the least profitable arm of the industry. This effectively ended the studio system and killed the 'B' picture, which was an inexpensively produced film that accompanied the main feature on a double bill. To exhibitors, the advantage of the B picture was that it provided audiences with more entertainment and kept audiences in the theatre for longer, which helped concession stand trade. Studios sold product to exhibitors under a system known as "block-booking," which meant that exhibitors purchased a package of several films (some prestige and some B movies) from the studios instead of individual films. Block booking was also deemed illegal. Without guaranteed exhibition, the studios could not risk making small films that exhibitors might not buy, so studios invested heavily in expensive prestige productions and abandoned the production-line approach that had characterised Hollywood's 'Golden Age'. Although the Paramount Decision radically refigured the film industry, it did so slowly because the major studios were slow to act on its rulings. Only by the early 1950s – well after the trend toward declining attendance had commenced – had most major studios begun divesting their interests in exhibition.

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[24] Doherty, Pre-Code, p.336

[25] Ibid., p.147

Audiences probably resented the fact that double bills pairing prestige films with B movies became less common in the early 1950s, and this may have contributed to Hollywood's inability to attract audiences back. But audiences were in decline before this, and political pressures, to a far greater extent than the Paramount Decision, shaped the film content that repelled viewers

Hollywood blamed television for its problems and saw television as its rival for audiences. It employed strategies that television could not mimic to win audiences back. The film industry turned to gimmicks like colour, Cinerama, 3D, CinemaScope, Aromarama (or "smell-o-vision") and Psycho-rama (subliminal messages), with varying success. Major studios invested large sums in elaborate, panoramic epics like The Ten Commandments, Ben Hur and Cleopatra, again with varying success, to showcase cinema's grand scale.[26] Hollywood attempted to produce more mature and provocative films that addressed material that would be unsuitable for television's general family audience, but found itself stymied by the Production Code. Studios were irked that television was not similarly restricted, complaining to the Senate subcommittee that "TV producers are bound only by token acceptance of the principles and practices embodied in the film code and do not maintain an administration strictly to apply them," meaning "television is correspondingly freer to engage in sensational appeal to the public." The subcommittee agreed that the television industry "presently fails sufficiently to curb either in quality or relative quantity its representations of crime, violence and sexual immorality." However, the subcommittee argued – in an opinion that the film industry obviously did not share since it sought justification to produce its own tawdry productions to lure audiences – that this caused "fast-growing public resistance and a loss of public following (and consequently of patronage for commercial sponsors)."[27] The contradiction that irked the film industry was that the subcommittee defended the free market's ability to curb prurient content in television's case, yet did not trust it to do so with films.

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[26] Thomas Doherty, Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), p.24-30

[27] U.S. Congress, Motion Pictures and Juvenile Delinquency, p.30

Hollywood confronted a crisis that imperilled America's greatest Cold War propaganda outlet. Due to the international success of Hollywood films, America held a tremendous public relations advantage over the Soviet Union in promoting its ideals and way of life through celluloid. As Eric Johnston proclaimed: "it is no exaggeration to say that the modern motion picture industry sets the styles for half the world. There is not one of us who isn't aware that the motion picture industry is the most powerful medium for the influencing of people that man has ever built."[28] He noted that American exports "profited through the demand for American merchandise initially observed by foreign moviegoers in American films,"[29] and urged Hollywood to capitalise on its ability to "set new styles of living" and popularise the "doctrine of production" by telling the "democracy story."[30] In 1947, he told HUAC: "I want to see it become a joke to be a Communist in America. I want it to be fashionable to radiate conviction and pride in our democratic capitalism."[31]

Yet, ironically, domestic anti-communism was threatening the existence of this powerful Cold War tool. It was, after all, the application of containment ideology on the domestic front that had fuelled HUAC's investigations of Hollywood, which subsequently impelled the industry to blacklist talented left-leaning writers, producers, directors and actors. More importantly, the HUAC investigations had made studios reluctant, for the early part of the 1950s at least, to pursue projects that could court controversy or raise the ire of political forces. Hollywood studios, wedged between rabid counter-subversives on one side and Production Code prudes on the other, saw their tepid productions play to declining audiences. Americans increasingly preferred to stay home and watch television, which was comparatively unregulated.

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[28] Lary May, The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p.176

[29] Stephen Vaughn, "Political Censorship During the Cold War: The Hollywood Ten" in Francis G. Couvares, Movie Censorship and American Culture (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), p.250

[30] May, p.176

[31] Quoted in Jonathon Munby, Public Enemies, Public Heroes: Screening the Gangster From Little Caesar to Touch of Evil (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p.217

Although the Production Code wielded tremendous influence, its main tenets were based on the false conviction that meaning could be contained at the level of the text. Similar to the Supreme Court's 1915 ruling that posited that films possess the power to disseminate 'evil', the Code alleged films' domination over the audiences that watch them. For example, it stated that films "affect the moral standards of those who thru [sic] the screen take in these ideas and ideals."[32] Audiences, in such a scenario, merely "take in" ideas portrayed on screen; they do not actively engage in interpreting events displayed before them. Moreover, the Code charged that "[p]sychologically, the larger the audience, the lower the moral mass resistance to suggestion."[33] In other words, audiences absorb the meanings that the film disseminates, and the larger the audience, the more susceptible is the crowd to suggestion.

Moreover, the Production Code assumes that narrative closure determines and fixes the meaning of the text. The Code emphasised that films could present evil-doing or sinful acts but only provided that "in the end the audience feels that *evil is wrong* and *good is right*."[34] The Code suggested that evil need not necessarily be punished, as long as it was ultimately clear to the audience that it was wrong. In practice, however, filmmakers seldom found methods other than punishing evil-doers to clarify this message and ensure Code approval. Indeed, the Code Office often demanded that evil acts be punished. For example, Breen forced director Elia Kazan to alter the ending of the film version of Tennessee Williams' play A Streetcar Named Desire to punish Stanley Kowalski and explicitly emphasise the evil act he committed. To punish Kowalski's rape of his sister-in-law Blanche Dubois, Kowalski's wife Stella and their new-born baby leave him. The film closes with her murmuring to the baby, "We're never going back. Never, never back, never back again" to underscore that Stanley has lost his family forever.[35]

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[32] Doherty, Pre-Code, p.349

[33] Ibid., p.350

[34] Ibid., p.351

[35] Dawn B Sova, Forbidden Films: Censorship Histories of 125 Motion Pictures (New York, NY: Checkmark Books, 2001), p.286

Yet, Hollywood writers, directors and producers credited their audiences with the ability to read films actively and to produce readings at odds with films' Production Code dictated conclusions. In A Streetcar Named Desire, for example, numerous scenes that show Stella returning to Stanley following his heinous acts of physical and psychological abuse potentially subvert the message of the film's ending. In one of these scenes, Stanley becomes enraged at Stella while he is playing cards and rips her radio off the wall and hurls it out the window. He beats Stella before his friends pull him off. He then flies into a violent rage while Stella flees to the sanctuary of the neighbours upstairs. Dripping wet and standing at the foot of the stairs in his ripped t-shirt, Stanley repeatedly calls Stella's name with increasing desperation until she hypnotically glides down the stairs and, with glazed eyes, falls wordlessly into his arms.[36] As Murray Schumach suggests, Stella's desire for Stanley is demonstrated so strongly in the film as to throw doubt on the ending: "Thus, the twelve-year-olds could believe Stella was leaving her husband. But the rest of the audience would realize [her vow to leave him forever] was just an emotional outburst of the moment."[37]

Hollywood writers, directors and producers also knew meaning could not be contained at the literal level of the text and devised strategies to circumvent Code restrictions. Writers, for instance, often encoded double entendres into their scripts that passed the censor's scrutiny but were obvious to viewers willing to think laterally. Howard Hawks' The Big Sleep, for example, needed a flirtatious, erotically charged scene to establish a sexual connection between detective Phillip Marlowe, played by Humphrey Bogart, and his client Vivienne Rutledge, played by Lauren Bacall. To avoid the wrath of the Code Office, the pertinent scene has the characters discussing horses:

> Rutledge: Tell me, what do you do when you're not working?
> Marlowe: Play the horses, fool around….
> R: Speaking of horses, I like to play them myself. But I like to see them work out a little first – see if they're front-runners or come-from-behind… find out their whole card, what makes them run.
> M: Find out mine?
> R: I think so. I'd say you don't like to be rated. You like to get out in front, open up a lead, take a breather in the back stretch, then come home free.

[36] Streetcar Named Desire. Dir. Elia Kazan. Perf. Marlon Brando, Kim Hunter, Vivien Leigh. Warner Brothers, 1951.

[37] Ibid.

> M: You don't like to be rated yourself… [but I need] to see you over a distance of ground. You got a touch of class, But I wanna see how far you can go.
> R: A lot depends on who's in the saddle.[38]

Although such strategies skirted some of the Code's prohibitions, more often than not the Code managed to inhibit filmmakers' attempts to depict, and audiences' desires to see, more adventurous subject matter.

Youth Films and the Circumvention of Code Office Regulations

Despite employing strategies to circumvent some constraints on filmic content, filmmakers still faced a frustrating web of contradictions that emanated primarily from the incompatibility of containment culture with liberal capitalism. As America's most effective international propaganda outlet for capitalist values, the film industry had to stay solvent. Yet, its main profit source, the domestic audience, was declining rapidly. This was at least in part a ramification of domestic containment, specifically the anti-communist investigations in Hollywood. To attract audiences, filmmakers had to engage more provocative subject matter, yet had to comply with regulations which forbade most controversial subjects.

What could be loosely called the 'genre' of the 1950s youth culture film emerged out of these contradictions. The three films that established the template for the genre that followed, The Wild One, Rebel Without a Cause and Blackboard Jungle, attempted to attract audiences and profit from the national hysteria about juvenile delinquency in the 1950s. Because of their potentially inflammatory content, the Code Office forced changes upon each film. However, despite Code interference, each film was immensely popular with 1950s youth, who were drawn to the film's depiction of radical fissure dividing adult and youth culture. Despite each film's Code-dictated attempt to demonise delinquency and youth culture, these films, as the subcommittee feared, provided "satisfaction, support,… sanction" and stimulus to the youth culture.

The Wild One was Columbia's low budget attempt to profit from the public's growing fascination with burgeoning motorcycle gangs in California. As we have seen, the script was based on Frank Rooney's 1947 article for Harper's titled "The Cyclists'

[38] The Big Sleep. Dir. Howard Hawks. Perf. Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall. Warner Brothers, 1946.

Raid," which detailed the Hollister Riots. Fearing that the film would glamorise the biker gangs and appear too sympathetic toward them, the Code Office forced many revisions. The Code Office also demanded that a voiceover introduction mitigate the film's violence and anarchy by emphasising that the whole episode was a one-off event which would never happen again. Infuriated lead actor Marlon Brando, who felt the introduction diminished the impact and relevance of the film, assumed a comical southern accent to make the introduction as disingenuous as he could.[39] The Code Office also forced a written preface, similar to that of Blackboard Jungle, to accompany the film to underscore its anti-delinquency theme. Shown against a still shot of a long, empty road, it read: "This is a shocking story. It could never take place in most American towns – but it did in this one. It is a public challenge not to let it happen again." Director Laslo Benedek had the motorcycle gang ride menacingly, with motors revving and tyres screeching, over the empty road as the warning dissolved, as if the bikers were trampling the warning.

One of the significant amendments the Code Office forced on The Wild One was to remove any reason for the bikers' transience. The original script made it clear that the bikers were unemployed. The gangs' disillusionment with and hostility toward authority and middle class living was thus a product of their feelings of inadequacy and disenfranchisement. However, Breen felt that this was an implicit critique of the American economy and the system of capitalism in that the failure to provide universal employment bred a transient, violent underclass of lawless males.[40] In the film, there is no explicit explanation for the bikers' behaviour. When a town local asks Johnny what he is rebelling against, he simply says: "Whad'ya got?"[41] Ironically, this vague rebellion was arguably more subversive than the original social critique to which Breen objected, for it widened the film's appeal. Coupled with the bikers' 'juvenilisation' - expressed when they address authority figures as "Daddy" and these authority figures retort with "boys" - the bikers' vague, inarticulate disaffection aligned them with young people's general sense of discontent. As Graham McCann puts it, youth's attraction to this vagueness was

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[39] Charles Higham, Brando: The Unauthorized Biography (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1987), p.133-6

[40] Graham McCann, Rebel Males: Clift, Brando, and Dean (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), p.15

[41] The Wild One. Dir. Laslo Benedek. Perf. Marlon Brando, Lee Marvin, Mary Murphy. Columbia Pictures, 1954.

that any posited reason for the bikers' delinquency seemed "too rigid – a strait-jacket for longings whose very lack of clear contours is an aspect of their power."[42]

The Code Office's suggested amendments to Rebel Without a Cause similarly worked to widen the film's appeal among youths. The Office demanded that director Nicholas Ray eradicate the implied homoerotic desire between Jim and Plato. However, this aspect of their relationship remained latent in the film (largely due to the tension between the two actors who were rumoured to have actualised this latency off-screen). Furthermore, in an effort to subdue the homoeroticism, Ray transferred Plato's desire for Jim into his desire for a father figure. Ray makes this transference clear when Plato proposes Jim spend the night at his house so they can have breakfast together, but then tells Jim "I wish you were my father."

Yet, this transference in fact accentuated the trenchant critique of parenthood made throughout the film, which augmented the divisions between youth and adult culture. The parents of each of the three youths the film portrays in depth – Plato, Judy and Jim – are failures who prompt their children to seek approval and guidance in the delinquent peer group. Plato's divorced parents cause him to invent fantasies about them, and his absent father and travelling mother are blamed for his erratic uncontrollable behaviour, including his attraction to Jim. As he has no parental figure to model normal gender and sexual roles for him, Plato confuses his yearning for a masculine role model with homosexual desire. As an indictment of his own absent father, Plato fantasises to Judy that "next summer [Jim] is gonna take me with him hunting and fishing. I want him to teach me how cause I know he won't get mad if I goof."

Unlike Plato's parents, Judy's are present but they are similarly unable to provide their child with emotional support and stability. Her father cannot cope with her burgeoning sexuality. He spurns her affections and her pleas to lavish attention on his "glamour-puss" like he did when she was a child. He laments, "I don't know what to do. All of a sudden she's a problem." Judy complains to a counsellor that he calls her a "dirty tramp" and aggressively rubs the make-up off her lips before she goes out. Judy's mother merely spouts platitudes, explaining Judy's emotional outbursts as the product of an "awkward age, where nothing fits." Her parents' lack of understanding and affection

[42] Ibid., p.16

forces Judy to look to the delinquent gang for approval. But, as she explains to Jim, this is no adequate substitute because "nobody is sincere."

Jim's parents are, as he screams at them, "tearing him apart." Jim's mother undermines her feeble husband's decisions and nags him into paralysis. His parents' bickering compels Jim to take to the streets, and lack of parental guidance means he constantly gets into trouble with gangs. When Jim alleges that they don't provide for him, Jim's father protests "Don't I give you everything you want?" Jim replies coldly "You buy me many things," reflecting the material abundance but emotional poverty of his home. His parents blame Jim for his waywardness, and move into new neighbourhoods every time Jim gets into trouble. Jim is appalled by his father's submissiveness. He tells a police officer: "If only he'd just hit [Mom] once, just once…" When Jim's mother threatens to move the family out of town again after she hears that Jim is once again in trouble, Jim objects: "No!... You're not using me as an excuse again, Mom. Every time you can't face yourself you want to move and you say it's because of me or the neighbourhood or some other phony excuse." Jim pleads with his father to stand up to her and then attempts to strangle his submissive father when he does not respond.[43]

As we have seen, Jim's father's emasculation throws Jim's manhood into question. He struggles with his masculine identity, repetitively but futilely asking his father how to be a man. Jim's gender confusion is underscored on his first day of school, when he mistakenly enters the girls' toilets after misreading the sign on the door. Associating masculinity with fearlessness and action, and fearing that he will emulate his father's emasculation, Jim reacts violently when the juvenile delinquent gang calls him "chicken," threatening one with a tyre iron and lunging at another with a switchblade knife. As he tries to explain to his bewildered father, this insult threatens his insecure sense of masculinity: "They called me 'chicken'. Y'know, *chicken*? I had to go [and meet their challenge]. If I didn't, I'd never be able to face those kids again."

Inadequate parenting pushes Jim into the delinquent gang. When challenged to a "chickie run" by gang leader Buzz, Jim seeks his father's advice. However, his ineffectual father merely tells him that it is "just a phase" and that he will look back on it

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[43] Margot Henriksen, Dr Stangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p.165-7

in ten years and laugh. Jim asks his father if he is going to stop him from going, to which his father replies: "Did I ever stop you from doing anything?" As Jim gets increasingly desperate and nervous, his father offers to "write a list, weighing the pros and cons." He adds "if we still don't know, we'll get some help," evoking the era's tendency to forsake personal autonomy for the authority of experts. Jim storms out and participates in the "chickie run" that kills Buzz.

The juvenile gang demonstrates the fissure between adults and youth. It reflects the young's sense of aimlessness and nihilism whenever "fun" amounts to jabbing each other with knives and racing cars towards the cliff's edge. While at the chickie run, Buzz contemplates the edge of the cliff as "the end," then tells Jim he likes him, and Jim asks: "Why do we do this?" Buzz simply shrugs and says "you gotta do something, don'tcha?" As Graham McCann puts it, the chickie run symbolised "these teenagers' chaotic but headlong rush towards an oblivion which, in a frightening way, is oddly seductive to these impressionable young people trapped in a world seemingly without meaning and beyond human control."[44]

In the film, adult authorities try to take the place of failing parents, as Ray Framek, an officer at juvenile hall, plays proxy father figure to Jim. Attending to a drunken and violent Jim in the opening scenes of the film, Ray draws Jim into a fight so that Ray can subdue him. Ray earns Jim's respect through his physical superiority and gains his trust, assuring Jim "If the kettle starts boiling again, will you come and see me before you get yourself in a jam…. It's easier sometimes than talking to your parents." Yet, following the chickie run, Jim goes to the police station and asks to see Ray. The officers there initially ignore Jim and then tell him that Ray is not there, underscoring the futility of proxy parental figures.

With their own families failing them, Jim, Judy and Plato form a family unit of their own while they hide out in a deserted mansion. At first, Jim and Judy play at being a married couple, and Plato their real estate agent who shows them around the mansion. Imitating adults, Plato asks if they have children, and Judy laughs and says "not those

[44] McCann, p.147

ghastly things," while Jim, in a Mr Magoo voice[45] says "we'd drown them like puppies," reflecting the contempt they feel their parents have for them. Yet, it becomes clear that Plato's yearning for Jim as a father figure renders Jim and Judy father and mother to Plato's child, as Plato once again reiterates to Jim: "If only you coulda been my dad."[46] However, as Plato sleeps like a puppy at their feet near the swimming pool, Jim and Judy leave him while they explore the mansion, and members of the gang, angry at Buzz's death, find him and attack him. Plato escapes and runs into the mansion, and shoots one of the gang with his father's gun. He is then chased by police, who call for back-up saying "there's a cookaboo loose with a gun"; Plato takes refuge in the nearby planetarium. Jim finds Plato there, where Plato angrily shouts "I'm glad you're not my father" at him. When Plato runs out of the planetarium, the police shoot him. Jim's weeps over the corpse as his father helps him up and supports him, reassuring him that "you did all that a man could."[47]

The ending is somewhat ambivalent in that in doing "all a man could" as Plato's surrogate father, Jim fails to prevent his death. Like all father figures in the film, Jim cannot provide appropriate guidance. Moreover, although Jim's father tells him "you can depend on me from now on, trust me," the ending resolves few of the parental and gender problems that the film blames for producing juvenile delinquency, and suggests that the cycle of youth rebellion will continue. As the title indicates, the film portrayed a vague, ill-defined rebellion that resonated with 1950s youths. Jim Stark's mumbling, halting expression of his angst underscored this. As with Marlon Brando's Johnny in The Wild One, James Dean's character's battle to express himself clearly emphasised that words are "inadequate to convey the tangle of inner feelings… inarticulateness was a virtue; it said much about the confusions, doubts and fears of modern adolescents."[48] Moreover,

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[45] Jim Backus, who played Jim's father, also voiced the popular cartoon Mr Magoo. James Dean imitates the character's voice here.

[46] McGee and Robertson, p.36; Peter Biskind, Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), p.209

[47] Rebel Without a Cause. Dir. Nicholas Ray. Perf. James Dean, Natalie Wood, Sal Mineo, Corey Allen. Warner Brothers, 1955.

[48] McCann, p.17, 24

Jim's unresolved insecurities about his manhood rendered him an inadequate father figure, promising that the ensuing generation would continue the cycle of fractured, angst-ridden and deviant masculinity that produced juvenile delinquency.

The Code Office also targeted Blackboard Jungle, MGM's entry into the juvenile delinquency furore. Blackboard Jungle was based on Evan Hunter's novel that depicted a teacher embroiled in a battle with a classroom full of young criminals. Hunter's naturalistic novel sought to document the urban 'jungle' from a pseudo-anthropological viewpoint, methodically analysing the "trash can of the school system." In doing so, Hunter subverted middle class notions that public education provides a vehicle for social mobility, as in the end the teacher only manages an ambiguous victory over the worst of the delinquents.[49] When adapted to film, the Code Office demanded that the gritty realism of Hunter's novel, which included swearing and vividly rendered violence, be sanitised. In a Code compliant ending, the teacher Dadier wins a victory over the delinquents by garnering the support of some of the other students, demonstrating how one dedicated teacher can 'tame' the 'jungle'. Fearing that the film's depiction of the public school system was too unpatriotic, the New York offices of MGM suggested, with the Code Office in mind, the film include a scene either showing a riot in a Moscow high school or at least alluding to juvenile delinquency being much worse in the Soviet Union. Director Richard Brooks refused, but relented to demands to insert an episode where Dadier visits a functioning school with model students to demonstrate that North Manual is not representative of the entire school system.[50]

Despite such amendments, the film starkly rendered the generation gap in confrontations between teachers and students. In one, a maths teacher brings his prized jazz record collection to school to try to stimulate his class, but instead hoodlums hurl his collection into walls, snap them in half, and sarcastically ask "who wants to hear Charlie?" and "ain't you got any bop?"[51] Other scenes depicting the gap in values between teachers and students underscore this explicit rejection of adult cultural tastes.

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[49] Medovoi, p.144

[50] Gilbert, p.183-4; McGee and Robertson, p.144

[51] At this time, 'bop' was a word that denoted rhythm and blues and prototypes of rock n roll, rather than be-bop jazz.

For example, Dadier brings a tape recorder into class in an effort to improve his class's English skills. He believes if they hear themselves speak in their rough ethnic and working class dialect, then they will modify their speech to conform to the white middle class speech patterns that Dadier demonstrates. However, the class insists that Dadier give the microphone to Morales, a Puerto Rican, whose rough language and repeated use of the word "stinking" (or "f-cking" in the novel) subverts Dadier's demonstration of institutional language and brings howls of laughter from the class. Dadier accuses the class of making fun of Morales, interpreting his swearing as a product of his ethnicity and his failure to master English. He admonishes the class: "I see you're really good friends to Morales." Gregory, however, seeing the laughter as more of a rejection of Dadier's attempts to assimilate the class to middle class white adult values, replies "sure are, too bad you ain't the same, Teach."[52] In another scene, Artie West explains to Dadier his reasons for refusing to abide adult authority, blaming American society for not providing him a future:

> A year from now, the army comes by and they say, 'okay Artie West, you get in a uniform and you be a soldier, and you save the world and you get your lousy head blowed right off.' Or maybe, maybe, I get a year in jail and maybe when I come out, the army… they don't want Artie West to be a soldier no more. Maybe what I get is *out*.

West's comment reflects his sense of alienation and exclusion from mainstream adult society. West's preference for incarceration over military service articulates a trenchant critique of adult culture's notions of patriotism, emphasising that, for impoverished youths like West, 'national service' amounts to getting one's "lousy head blowed right off" in America's foreign conquests.

Blackboard Jungle's brief use of rock n roll music was indicative of the generational fissure that the film documented. Bill Haley and the Comets' "Rock Around the Clock" plays at the opening of the film and could be interpreted as a strategic subversion of the Code enforced preface. As the preface scrolls across the screen alerting viewers to the "problem of juvenile delinquency" that the film engages, military tattoo-style drums play on the soundtrack to evoke officialdom and order. However, this tattoo

[52] Medovoi, p.159

beat leads seamlessly into "Rock Around the Clock," a song that represented the burgeoning rock n roll style that was synonymous with youth culture's rejection of adult values. During screenings of the film, the song frequently provoked teenagers in the audience to leave their seats and dance in the aisles, as they did during the first preview screening of the film.[53] The song was a clarion call to youthful members of the audience that encouraged them to identify with the students who were pitted against figures of adult authority in the film. One Toronto alderman noted with disgust that local teenagers had cheered Blackboard Jungle during the screening he attended. In particular, "the great applause in the film came when a 'tough guy' pupil told a teacher to 'go to hell' and then drew a knife and stabbed the teacher."[54]

Thus, if it did not intentionally and explicitly encourage youths to overturn its overt Code-compliant 'message', Blackboard Jungle contained enough elements of interest to appeal to youth audiences. The divergent responses of audiences to the film demonstrated that, contrary to Code and containment logic, narrative closure did not determine audience readings. Teenagers supported and celebrated Artie West's actions, even when he ended up cowering in the corner of the classroom.[55] Most importantly, the film also showed that the young comprised an enthusiastic audience eager to see their peers depicted on screen, even if they met an untimely demise.

Youth Films and Spectatorship at the 'Passion Pits'

The unexpected success of The Wild One, Rebel Without a Cause and Blackboard Jungle alerted many filmmakers to the potential popularity and profitability of teenage-targeted films. Working closely with exhibitors, small independent companies like American International Pictures (AIP) and Allied Artists (AA) produced scores of films targeted directly at teenagers during the mid to late 1950s. These films could be called a 'genre' due to their aesthetic and thematic consistency, although they often intersected

[53] Gilbert, p.184

[54] Medovoi, p.148-9

[55] A survey of high school students in 1956 found Blackboard Jungle to be overwhelmingly most students' favourite film. It is more likely that their enjoyment of the film emanated from Artie's juvenile delinquent rebellion, even though it ultimately failed, than from Dadier's taming of the classroom jungle. Doherty, Teenpics, p.75

with (and sometimes initiated) other distinct film genres like juvenile delinquency, horror, science fiction, hot rod, motorcycle and rock n roll films. One of the main differences between these films and juvenile delinquent, horror and science fiction films from earlier eras was that youth films of the 1950s catered to youth interests, endeavoured to attract a youth audience specifically, and featured youth characters in leading roles, consigning adults to peripheral roles. Predominant features of these films included contemporary settings, teen leading characters, teen-specific problems (in battling mystified and bemused adult authorities or grappling with peer pressure), rock n roll soundtracks and teen jargon. Frequently, these films, taking their inspiration from the three prototypical youth films, would feature scenes depicting motorcycle racing and street brawling (from The Wild One), drag races and violent confrontations between adults and youth (from Blackboard Jungle), and teen angst, switchblade knife fights and 'chicken runs' (from Rebel Without a Cause).

Scholarly reconstructions of the 1950s have tended to dismiss these youth films as unworthy objects of study. James Gilbert typically dismisses these films in a book devoted specifically to the cultural construction of the juvenile delinquent in the 1950s when he argues that after some 'important' films, namely Blackboard Jungle and Rebel Without a Cause, "the genre deteriorated into formula films about teenagers, made principally for drive-in audiences who were not particular about the features they saw." He goes on: "generally, by the end of the 1950s, Hollywood had ceased to take the subject [juvenile delinquency] with any seriousness. Instead, youth culture films relied on stereotypes developed from more serious films but voided of any content. Formulaic explanations took the place of complex or ambiguous portrayals."[56]

Gilbert's argument that these youth films seldom approached their subjects with seriousness, and that, for the most part, they relied on derivative stereotypes for their characterisation is persuasive. However, his refusal to consider the cultural reception of these representations of juvenile delinquency leaves unanswered questions, like what appeal did these repeated stereotypes hold for young people? What do these specific formulae tell us about the youth culture? To address these questions, it is vital to examine

[56] Gilbert, p.189-92

the viewing conditions under which adolescents were most likely to watch these films, namely the drive-in theatre.[57] Gilbert argues that "drive-in audiences were not particular about the films they saw," and this is in a sense true, but not because drive-in audiences lacked the capacity to appraise these films' quality. Rather, the drive-in theatre as a venue was a more compelling attraction to the young than any particular film that played there.

The drive-in provided a space for teenagers to gather and participate in a myriad of youth cultural rituals, like customised car culture, dating, hanging out, rock n roll fandom and watching youth movies. The films shown at the drive-in allowed young people to experience a heightened sense of their participation in the 'youth culture' because these films often documented, and provided the occasion for, youth-specific cultural interests and rituals, and because they emphasised the generation gap between youths and their parents. The companies making the films and the theatres showing the films were predictably less invested in generational rebellion than in finding ways to overcome a stagnant film economy and historically entrenched obstacles to new competitors in the film industry. In the young, these producers and exhibitors found a plentiful, affluent and identifiable audience enjoying increased mobility and financial independence thanks to the postwar economic boom, an audience who embraced the drive-in as a key site for engaging in rituals that nourished the sense of a distinct, autonomous 'youth culture'.

Drive-in movie theatres thrived during the postwar economic boom. Although the first drive-in theatre (or "ozoner") opened in 1933, it was not until the postwar period that the phenomenon firmly established itself in American popular culture, with the number of drive-ins ballooning from 500 in 1950 to over 5000 by 1957. While a number of social and economic factors – including ebbing attendance at urban theatres due to suburbanisation, the Paramount decision that ended studio producers' monopoly over exhibition and distribution, the vapid Hollywood productions in the wake of HUAC and the increasing competition for viewers from television – decimated traditional film venues, drive-ins flourished. In fact, the number of drive-in theatres in the 1950s rose in direct proportion to the decline of traditional urban "four walls." By 1959 drive-in

[57] These films were made to be viewed specifically at the drive-in theatre, but they were shown in other indoor theatres as well. I consider this later in the chapter.

attendance equalled that of traditional theatres.[58] Other than reflecting postwar America's romance with the automobile, drive-ins profited from their ability to mitigate factors that afflicted urban theatres. Drive-ins, for example, were generally built close to suburban areas and drew this burgeoning population, and offered a novel viewing experience that distinguished drive-ins from other types of televisual and filmic spectatorship. As one drive-in theatre owner emphasised, his audience "just came to the drive-in for whatever type of entertainment was presented… we sell the drive-in theatre to the public, not the picture. The program is secondary."[59] Another component that augmented drive-ins' success was that by the late 1950s the influential and profitable youth audience increasingly patronised the outdoor theatres, and drive-in owners increasingly welcomed this audience.

Drive-ins were not, however, the exclusive domain of teenagers. Part of drive-ins' success must be attributed to their enticement of audiences that traditional theatres wilfully ignored. Drive-in advertising targeted parents with young children, housewives, disabled people, racial minorities and even the hygienically challenged.[60] Herbert J. Ochs, a drive-in theatre proprietor, described his typical audience in 1946 whilst refuting indoor theatres' claims that drive-ins were stealing their audience:

> Our crowds are made up of couples who can't find anyone to stay home with the babies, so they bring them in the car. We got invalids who return as many as four times a week, people who otherwise would never see a picture. Among our regulars are two fat ladies who do not go to indoor theatres because they don't fit into regular seats. No sir, not 5 percent of our crowd is a potential indoor theatre crowd.[61]

In the 1950s, youth joined this diverse audience in growing numbers. Throughout the 1950s, teenagers increasingly appropriated drive-in theatres and transformed them into vital sites of youth cultural activity, often, initially at least, to the chagrin of drive-in proprietors. From drive-ins' inception, operators battled citizens groups concerned about

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[58] Doherty, p.24, 113

[59] Kerry Segrave, Drive-In Theaters: A History From Their Inception in 1933 (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992), p.39

[60] Mary Morley Cohen, "Forgotten Audiences in the Passion Pits: Drive-in Theatres and Changing Spectator Practices in Post-War America" in Film History, vol.6, no.4 (1994), p.471

[61] Ibid., p.38

the salacious immoral activities in which patrons could be engaging from the privacy and seclusion of their cars. Operators also had to placate neighbouring residents' complaints about traffic, noise and rowdiness. A Massachusetts attorney summed up the allegations against drive-ins at a public hearing where he urged that the theatres should be "forced to remain out in the country where they belong" because they are "noisy, not clean from a physical or moral point of view, regardless of the claims of the proponents that drive-ins are family institutions."[62] As juvenile delinquency hysteria grew, operators became wary of courting controversy as their youth audience expanded. William Mooring, a Los Angeles film critic representing the Roman Catholic Diocese's official newspaper, foreshadowed the impending controversy in 1955 when he testified to the Senate subcommittee investigating juvenile delinquency that drive-ins "condone and encourage among their young customers behavior that called for some police action."[63]

The enormous profits that drive-in owners garnered from youth patrons more than compensated for such controversies. In rare cases, owners got a share of the ticket sales from the distributors, but owners solely reaped sizeable concession stand revenue. By the late 1950s, drive-in owners expected to match each dollar taken at the admission gate with one generated at the concession stand selling over-priced junk food to ravenous teenagers.[64] Drive-in owners who charged per person rather than per car were usually prepared to ignore teenagers who hid in their friends' trunks to save on admission because this money would be recouped at the concession stand.[65] Double- and triple-features were common drive-in ploys to maximise concession stand trade, as was booking poor quality films. As one drive-in owner told a distributor in 1957, "the worse the pictures are, the more stuff we sell."[66]

Drive-ins' marketing schemes encouraged youth attendance, unlike other drive-in commercial enterprises such as San Bernadino's McDonald's Famous Hamburgers which

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[62] Segrave, p.150

[63] Ibid.

[64] Doherty, Teenpics, p.114-5

[65] Segrave, p.71

[66] Ibid., p.94, 73

made a "point of providing no jukeboxes, pay phones or cigarette machines" in order to deter young patrons[67]. As the advertising kit for the 1955 film Teenage Crime Wave urged, "use rock-and-roll to call teen-age attention to your picture!.... Put rock-and-roll on your own p.a. system during show breaks, with frequent picture credits. Get a lobby juke box playing records of latest rock-and-roll!"[68] Many theatres followed this advice, accompanying screenings of music-based films like Rock Pretty Baby and Carnival Rock with rock n roll performances from local acts preceding the show, or at least with rock n roll music piped across the lot before the film began. Some theatres invited local car clubs and car enthusiasts to the theatre to help promote double bills like Hot Rod Rumble and Dragstrip Girl.[69]

As the above examples indicate, the drive-in fused many pursuits of the youth culture, most obviously the young's enthusiasm for cars. From the late 1940s onwards, youth's fascination for customising cars flourished. Teenagers 'chopped' (lowering the top of the car to bring it closer to the ground), 'channelled' (lowering the body of the car down between the wheels) and 'streamlined' (by removing all chrome plating, handles and excessive exterior materials) their cars beyond recognition.[70] Often replacing factory motors with souped-up V8 or racing engines, and decorating their hot-rods with murals, customising youths frequented drive-in commercial spaces – movie theatres and restaurants – to show off their designs and organise drag-races with other hot-rodders.[71] Drive-in theatres like the Piccadilly in Los Angeles were more famous for their patrons' cars than for their films.[72]

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[67] Christopher Finch, Highways to Heaven: The AUTO Biography of America (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), p.241

[68] Doherty, Teenpics, p.79

[69] Ibid., p.112

[70] Tom Wolfe, The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby (London: Mayflower Books, 1968), p.72

[71] Many customisers also furnished their vehicles with 'tuck and roll' upholstery which made the interior of the car resemble a combination of a diner booth and a bedroom suite.

[72] Wolfe, p.71

As hot-rods suggest, attractions peripheral to the ostensible main event of the drive-in movie theatre typically overshadowed specific featured films. For adolescents who were on dates, going to the drive-in as a cultural practice was far more important than going to view a particular film. The drive-in offered relative privacy for amorous couples seeking to elude parental surveillance. As Beth Bailey argues, 1950s parents generally agonised about the sexual behaviour of their children. Parents utilised strategies like setting curfews, sponsoring adult-supervised events, and advocating double and group dates to curtail couples' privacy. Bailey emphasises that such strategies made it "logistically difficult" for couples to gain time alone, but teenaged couples often "bought time" by skipping planned meal or movie dates to 'park' and make out.[73]

Drive-ins aided teenagers' quest for privacy. Drive-ins' penchant for double and triple features provided teenaged couples with ready excuses for long dates, whether they had seen the films or not. Drive-ins were also infamous for their 'passion pits', which comprised the most lascivious section of the audience. In the 1950s, teenagers rarely lived away from home and most motels would not rent rooms to unmarried couples and the few that would often set exorbitant rates, making the 'passion pits' one of the few places where couples could have private time. On the other hand, because drive-ins were well-populated, they enabled couples to explore their sexuality with the knowledge that help was close by if the male tried to push things further than the female was willing to go. The 'pits' were generally located at the very back of the drive-in lot, where there was the least light and most seclusion. Serious couples who were going steady generally populated the 'pits' for they provided a greater degree of intimacy than the middle rows, which more demure couples 'innocently' dating occupied, and the front-rows, where young couples on first dates parked.[74]

The passion pits were the most controversial aspect of drive-ins, and they provoked moral crusaders' ire. For example, in 1947, Reverend J. Virgil Lilly launched a campaign against the first drive-in theatre in Montgomery County, Maryland, which was still under construction. Lilly alleged that drive-ins had a "demoralizing influence leading

[73] Beth Bailey, From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University, 1988), p.84-7

[74] Segrave, p.152

to promiscuous relationships." The ensuing ordinance imposed a $1000 license fee and set an 11pm curfew for Sidney Lust's forthcoming theatre.[75] As this example shows, the passion pits predated 1950s youth, but the young quickly appropriated the pits, and youth became the focus of anxiety about drive-ins' salacious influence during the 1950s. The local community in Woodbridge, New Jersey, for example, initiated a court action to stop construction of a drive-in in their area because they feared excessive "teenage petting" and they wanted to dissuade teenagers from "'hanging out' during the early morning hours."[76] To counter such fears, many drive-ins employed bouncers and formed 'flashlight patrols' to monitor and deter lascivious behaviour in cars. One drive-in theatre chain in Memphis employed undercover police and detectives to eliminate "indecent behaviour." Its owner, David Flexer enforced a strict definition of 'indecency': "If a man puts his arms around a girl that's all right. But if she puts her arms around him, too, and they go into a clinch – well, that's out."[77]

This surveillance undoubtedly deterred "indecency" yet drive-ins could not slip their reputation as 'passion pits'. As Mary Cohen argues, this was more likely the result of drive-ins' heterogeneous audience and the associated fear of social interaction between diverse people than the actual behaviour of patrons.[78] As we have seen, a xenophobic fear of 'otherness' permeated 1950s America, and this fear was often manifest in anxiety about sexuality, particularly interracial sexuality. Drive-ins were unique commercial spaces in that they explicitly invited 'forgotten' audiences that other enterprises wilfully ignored. As one owner put it, "a familiar sight in many Drive-Ins is a car driven by an adult and crammed with happy children…. Fat people and cripples, who find it inconvenient to attend indoor movies, flock to Drive-Ins."[79] Furthermore, even in the Jim Crow South, drive-ins were integrated. Owners often overlooked Jim Crow laws because

[75] Cohen, p.470

[76] Segrave, p.62

[77] Cohen, .481

[78] Ibid., p.479

[79] Ibid., p.479

the privacy of one's car automatically segregated social space, although there was still potential for racial intermixing at the concession stand.[80]

In catering to and attracting a heterogeneous audience, drive-ins were similar to early forms of cinema, which provoked condemnation from conservative critics for their mixing of diverse audiences. Drive-ins' multiplicity of attractions also mirrored early picture shows. Although early cinematic conditions varied widely, one common exhibition space for early cinema was the variety show, where film was but one form of entertainment on offer. The Berlin picture palaces of the 1920s, for example, were typical of much early film exhibition in that their shows featured a succession of attractions, including live music and live performance, with short film features played intermittently. The design of these theatres drew attention away from the screen. As Siegfried Kracauer described it:

> The interior design of the movie theatres served one sole purpose: to rivet the audience's attention to the peripheral so that they will not sink into the abyss. The stimulations of the senses succeed each other with such rapidity that there is no room left for even the slightest contemplation to squeeze in between them.[81]

Similarly, drive-ins' designs typically distracted attention from the screen. One of the main appeals of the drive-in to families was that drive-ins often built playgrounds in front of the screen so that parents could monitor their children while they watched the film.[82] People frequently walked past the screen on their way to the playground, toilets or refreshment stand. Teenagers in particular wandered the site, visiting friends' cars. Some drive-ins included amusement parks on their sites, and the bright flashing neon lights from other attractions could draw a viewer's attention away from the screen. The preponderance of distraction, as I will elaborate shortly, meant that drive-ins offered a vastly different form of spectatorship than traditional indoor theatres, which, since the turn toward more 'democratic' public space in the 1930s, worked to normalise a discipline of silence and rapt attention to the screen among audiences.

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[80] Ibid., p.478

[81] Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator" in Linda Williams (ed.), Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), p.127

[82] Cohen, p.473

By re-introducing the distracting conditions that were typical of much early cinema, drive-ins reversed the trend toward reification of the screen as the central architectural consideration in modern theatre design. In reaction to audiences' rejection of the palatial and grandiose theatres built during the golden age of the silent era, from the 1930s theatre designers preferred more modest and practical cinemas. In part, the introduction of sound forced these changes. Rather than confronting the logistical problem of rewiring the picture palaces and amplifying sound to 1500-3000 viewers, designers favoured building smaller 600-seat venues.[83]

To a large extent, the new theatres reflected a turn to more 'democratic' public space. The ornamental film cathedrals constructed during the 1910s and 1920s like the Paramount, the Capitol and the Majestic in New York were modelled on aristocratic palaces and featured flowing stairs, decorative lobbies, shimmering reflective surfaces, archways and majestic seating for the wealthy, which worked, as Lary May argues, to reinforce the cultural authority of the rich. Theatres like Grauman's Chinese, the Tivoli and the Egyptian were ostentatiously decorated in 'ethnic' styles that emphasised the exotic and other-worldly cinematic experience.[84]

Designers in the 1930s abolished the decorative ornaments that showcased the cultural values of the rich. They also appealed to republican values to make theatres more overtly democratic. The Will Rogers theatre, for example, was built in the heart of a working class neighbourhood in Chicago. A mural depicting the Native American star on horseback underscored the rejection of elitist values, bearing the inscription: "My Ancestors didn't come over on the Mayflower – they met the Boat."[85]

Part of the reason for the eradication of the ornate columns and grand decorative archways that adorned the inside of theatres was that designers felt they distracted attention from the screen. In the new designs of the 1930s, the screen was paramount. Architect Ben Schlanger's designs enlarged the screen and blended it into the surrounding walls. In direct contrast to the Berlin picture palaces that buffered viewers

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[83] May, Big Tomorrow, p.102, 117

[84] Ibid., p.104-9

[85] Ibid., p.103-117

from "the abyss" of total immersion in the screen, Schlanger explained that his designs intended "the viewer to feel as little consciousness of surrounding walls and the ceiling as possible, so that he can completely envelope himself in that which he is viewing."[86]

The introduction of sound, the new theatre environment and the centrality of the screen transformed spectatorship. Scholars have termed this viewing environment "classical Hollywood cinema." Miriam Hansen argues that the introduction of sound ceased audience 'chatter' during the screening, imposing "the classical segregation of screen and theater space with its regime of absence and presence and its discipline of silence, spellbound passivity, and perceptual isolation."[87] The degree to which the end of the silent era eradicated audience chatter is debatable, as are notions of spectators' "spellbound" immersion in the motion picture. As Arthur Frank Wertheim points out, during the 1930s many theatres stopped projection during films and piped radio into theatres so that patrons could hear popular radio show Amos and Andy, showing that viewers were not too lost in the theatrical spectacle to divert their attention to the radio.[88] But, various idiosyncratic exhibition and viewing practices aside, the classical Hollywood cinema environment generally encouraged greater silence, stillness and attention toward the screen among its audiences than early silent theatres.

Lary May argues that a shift in narrative film coincided with the new theatres. Hollywood began to move away from opulent pictures set in foreign and fantastical lands in favour of films that reflected American republican values and "rooted characters and audiences in the vernacular art of a diverse people."[89] In part, this was because sound showcased America's varied dialects. Another important factor in this shift was that studios could scarcely afford to finance the lavish exotic spectacles of the silent era because of the Depression, and to audiences such films seemed grandiose and obscenely

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[86] Ibid., p.119

[87] Miriam Hansen, "Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere" in Linda Williams (ed.), Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), p.139

[88] Janet Staiger, "Writing the History of American Film Reception" in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (eds), Hollywood Spectatorship: Changing Perceptions of Cinema Audiences (London: British Film Institute, 2001), p.24

[89] May, Big Tomorrow, p.102

decadent. Following the Depression and the New Deal's Federal Arts Project, filmmakers increasingly turned to gritty realism which reflected audiences' desires to reject the decadent films of the previous decade. Besides the hardships of the Depression, one of the reasons audiences considered the picture palaces so ostentatious, abhorrent and incongruous was that their exotic and lavish designs no longer matched the subject matter of the films that played there.[90] New theatres bore names that evoked the turn to republicanism - the Roosevelt, the Lincoln, the Liberty, the Will Rogers, the People's Community Theater – and generally favoured theatre designs in which the centrality of the screen facilitated viewers' envelopment in films' realism.[91]

Theorising the Drive-In Spectator

The first drive-ins opened in the 1930s during the era of the new theatres and also reflected republican values. Drive-ins were usually built near working class neighbourhoods and generally spurned the ostentatious ornamentation of the silent picture palaces in favour of functional designs.[92] However, unlike four-walls built during this period, drive-ins were conducive to a distracted form of spectatorship in similar ways to the Berlin theatres Krauceur describes, which militated against viewers' immersion in the film image. The unique environment of the drive-in forces us to rethink conventional theorisations of film spectatorship that are based on the conditions of traditional cinematic exhibition.

Film theoreticians exploring psychoanalytic and Marxist approaches to film have based their analyses on the classical Hollywood cinema spectator's immersion in the screen image. Accordingly, these critics have generally ignored the actual viewer and the specific viewing conditions, focusing instead on the machinations of the text and the apparatus in producing viewing subjects; because they conceived the spectator as passive, while the text and means of exhibiting the text were active. Christian Metz, for example, describes audiences as

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[90] Ibid., p.103

[91] Ibid., p.128

[92] Segrave, p.142-3

> spectator-fish taking in everything with their eyes, nothing with their bodies: the institution of the cinema requires a silent, motionless spectator, a vacant spectator at once alienated and happy, acrobatically hooked up to himself by the invisible thread of sight.[93]

Similarly, Jean Louis Baudry noted viewers' passivity in the presence of the entrancing cinematic apparatus:

> No doubt the darkened room and the screen bordered with black like a letter of condolence already present privileged conditions of effectiveness – no exchange, no circulation, no communication with any outside. Projection and reflection take place in a closed space, and those who remain there, whether they know it or not (but they do not), find themselves chained, captured, or captivated.[94]

Each theorist locates cinema's power in its ability to entrance and transfix the spectator and awaken the spectator's unconscious desires. Metz applies to film Lacan's theorisation of the Mirror Phase, arguing that when viewing the film "the spectator *identifies with himself*, with himself as a pure act of perception."[95] The cinema's concealment of its industrial apparatus, the means of its production of sight and sound, Metz argues, enables the spectator to lose "himself" in the film's verisimilitude: "If the traditional film tends to suppress all the marks of the subject of enunciation [that is, the cinematic apparatus], this is in order that the viewer may have the impression of being that subject himself, but an empty, absent subject, a pure capacity for seeing."[96]

Baudry similarly conceives of the spectator as a production of the cinematic apparatus and similarly applies Lacan's theory of the Mirror Phase. For Baudry, "the spectator identifies less with what is represented, the spectacle itself, than with what stages the spectacle, makes it seen, obliging him to see what it sees; this is exactly the function taken over by the camera as a sort of relay."[97] Furthermore, to the spectator the

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[93] Quoted in Linda Williams, "Introduction" in Linda Williams (ed.), Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), p.2

[94] Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" in Philip Rosen (ed.), Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p.293-4

[95] Christian Metz, The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982), p.48-9

[96] Ibid., p.24

[97] Baudry, p.295

camera is a prosthetic organ, "grafted on to replace his own defective ones… capable of filling his function as a subject. This substitution is only possible on the condition that the instrumentation itself be hidden or repressed."[98] Thus, for Baudry, spectators derive pleasure from film because they are gifted a superior subjectivity to their own, which theatres' reification of the image, concealment of apparatus and immobilisation of the spectator make possible.

The psychoanalytic approaches of Metz and Baudry were crucial to widening theorists' understandings of the machinations of the cinematic apparatus and of the potential forces acting upon the viewing subject in the process of making meaning. Significantly, these approaches stressed the range of scopic pleasures available to the viewing subject outside of just the specific images of certain films. However, the models of spectatorship that Metz and Baudry advocated emphasised particular theatrical conditions that induced viewer passivity and ignored alternative viewing conditions. These approaches could account for neither active viewers who refused in whatever way to succumb to the discipline of silence, stillness and reverence to the screen image nor viewing conditions that did not conform to 'classical Hollywood cinema'.

The peculiar environment of the drive-in renders problematic such notions of pre-Oedipal womblike subjectivity. Instead of rapt screen attention, spectators were more often than not distracted away from the screen. Theatres offered many types of entertainment on their sites, some of which undoubtedly distracted audience attention from the film. In addition to films, the Walter Reade drive-in circuit, for instance,

> offered a playground, pony rides, a dance floor, shuffleboard and horseshoe pitching tournaments, cartoon carnivals, midnight spook shows, baby parades and 'beautiful child' contests, dare-devil car rides, circus acts, high-tower dives, anniversary and birthday celebrations (with special ceremonies and cake available for all patrons), fireworks, a picnic and play area free of charge for community use during the day, potato-sack races and television.[99]

Moreover, unlike Metz's silent, motionless, vacant and alienated spectator, and unlike Baudry's "chained, captured [and] captivated" subject, the drive-in viewer was able to

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[98] Ibid.

[99] Cohen, p.471

exercise agency over viewing conditions. As Richard Hollingshead, pioneer of the drive-in theatre, put it in 1933: "The Drive-In theater idea virtually transforms an ordinary motor car into a private theater box…. People may chat or even partake of refreshments… without disturbing those who prefer silence…. Here, the whole family is welcome, regardless of how noisy the children are apt to be."[100] After the introduction of individual speakers with volume settings in 1946, spectators could control the film's sound.

Because the car windscreen refracted and distorted the image of the film, the drive-in also problematised the spectator's immersion in the screen. The screen image's reflection off the car's hood, and the movement of people to and from the concession stand and other attractions, disrupted the spectator's entrancement in the film. Should a car's lights be switched on, the screen would be washed out, further dislocating a viewer's suspension of disbelief. Baudry notes "the disturbing effects which result during a projection from breakdowns in the recreation of movement, when the spectator is brought abruptly back to discontinuity – that is, to the body, to the technical apparatus which he had *forgotten*."[101] Yet, the drive-in spectator's distance – both physical distance from the screen in large drive-in lots and the distractions discouraging the spectator's immersion in the screen image – meant the spectator could scarcely forget the staged spectacle and the movie-making apparatus that produced it; the "disturbing effects" of "discontinuity" were likely to punctuate spectatorship constantly.[102]

Clearly, the drive-in offered a very different type of spectatorship than the traditional theatre. The environment of the drive-in, with its numerous distractions, invited the spectator to be mobile and vociferous, to have agency over his or her spectatorship. Yet, even indoor theatres were not guaranteed to provide the viewing conditions that characterise classical Hollywood cinema. Anecdotal evidence from the

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[100] Cohen, p.471-3

[101] Baudry, p.291

[102] Here, I refer to the drive-in spectator's probable awareness of the film theatre's conceit; that it is playing a film to him or her. Baudry and Metz argue that that the instrumentation producing the appearance of the image must be hidden from the spectator for the spectator to identify, as his or her own, the subjectivity that the film produces.

1950s suggests that audiences at traditional indoor theatres, especially adolescents, were not the regressed pre-Oedipal captives that Metz and Baudry conceive. Teenagers danced during screenings of Blackboard Jungle, for instance, and Variety reported that during a screening of Rock Around the Clock "the youngsters ruined some seats in their overactivity in jumping, and a lot of them rested their feet against the walls which will thus require some restoration. The kids also pockmarked the carpets with cigarette burns when ushers make [sic] them get rid of their weeds. However, with squads of Pinkerton and city police inside and outside the house, rowdiness was held down."[103] In some rougher neighbourhoods, there were reports that when ushers requested silence from noisy young toughs, the ushers were hurled over the balcony.[104] Rowdiness, then, probably coexisted – and disrupted – reverently silent forms of spectatorship at indoor theatres, but the point is that ushers, police officers and theatre managers tried to discourage it. At the drive-in such behaviour could hardly be called 'rowdiness'. The drive-in facilitated mobility and extra-filmic activity. Drive-in spectatorship was likely to be more physically active and less psychologically engaged than the 'classical' film experience.

Janet Staiger and Judith Mayne, among others, note that since the 1980s scholars have increasingly dismissed psychoanalytic critics' textually determined analyses of spectatorship.[105] In part, this was in response to the growth of home video and the spectator's autonomy over viewing conditions, which emphasised that conceptions of universal passive spectatorship were redundant.[106] To a large extent, scholars have dismissed text-determined analyses in favour of situating the spectator as the locus of meaning. Although psychoanalytic theorists have presented compelling reasons for *some* forms of spectator pleasure, their claims to universality are untenable. Scholars have

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[103] R. Serge Denisoff and William Romanowski, "Katzman's 'Rock Around the Clock': A Pseudo-event?" in Journal of Popular Culture 24 (1990-91), p.69

[104] Doherty, Teenpics, p.137

[105] See Janet Staiger, Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.120; Judith Mayne, "Paradoxes of Spectatorship" in Linda Williams (ed.), Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), p.172

[106] See, for example, Anne Friedberg, "Cinema and the Postmodern Condition" in Linda Williams (ed.), Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), p.72-4

increasingly turned to cultural studies approaches which, rather than assuming a universal relation between text and spectator as psychoanalysts did, locate the spectator in specific social and historical contexts.

As we have seen, Stuart Hall's seminal contribution to cultural studies approaches to spectatorship, "Encoding, Decoding," emphasised spectators' roles in decoding texts. Hall refers specifically to spectatorship of television news broadcasts, however film and television scholars have applied his ideas to spectatorship of fiction as well.[107] Hall argued that three methods of readership characterised these decodings; spectators read the texts in dominant-hegemonic, negotiated or oppositional ways. Spectators who aligned themselves with texts' dominant-hegemonic meanings agreed with the preferred meanings that the encoders, the producers of the text, intended to communicate. Negotiated readers operated "with exceptions to the rule" and accorded "the privileged position to the dominant definitions of events while reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to 'local conditions', to [their] own more *corporate* positions."[108] Oppositional readings, or readings that "decode the message in a *globally* contradictory way," reject the preferred meaning and "retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference," emphasising that there is "no necessary correspondence between encoding and decoding."[109] Spectators' social identity with regard to, among other factors, race, class, gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion, region and age – and hence their proximity to the dominant ideology and its preferred meanings – determines whether they make dominant-hegemonic, negotiated or oppositional readings.

Hall's ideas are based on the assumption that a text encodes a coherent "dominant ideology" or "preferred meaning," terms Hall uses synonymously. But when considering youth films made specifically for the drive-in theatre, the notion of "preferred meanings" is highly problematic, and there is dissonance between what one might call the "dominant ideology" and the text's "preferred meanings." As we have seen, these films sought to attract youth audiences by celebrating the young's difference from adults, through depicting generational conflict, youthful rebellion and other provocative aspects of the

[107] See, for example, John Fiske's work.

[108] Hall, p.102

[109] Ibid., p.100, 103

youth culture. Yet, the Production Code Office that mandated the demise of sinners and wrong-doers – like the delinquents who were often celebrated in these films – restricted permissible content, and forced filmmakers to punish these youths. Thus, what often resulted was that these films celebrated and glamorised young rebels before killing them off or having them incarcerated. Because of this, these films were too ideologically contradictory to proffer a "preferred meaning" or to reflect a dominant ideology unequivocally.

These films were an index of the tension between containment and capitalism. Containment logic, as mediated through the Code Office, forced these films ultimately to punish the wrong-doing teenagers they depicted, and one could argue that this forced these films to comply with what Hall would call the "dominant ideology." After all, the Code Office, as we have seen, forced changes upon films that it felt subverted the hegemonic containment narrative and therefore policed films' ideological content, coercing at least superficial adherence to Cold War America's dominant ideology. However, if these films did to an extent reflect aspects of the dominant ideology in complying with the Code Office, this was not necessarily these films' 'preferred meanings'.

Drive-In Films and the Youth Spectator

At the level of authorial intent, the pre-eminent commercial imperative of these drive-in films problematises the notion of 'preferred meanings'. In other words, the filmmakers who produced films for the youth drive-in market were motivated primarily by making profits rather than making artistic or political statements. While commerce is a primary consideration for most Hollywood productions, generally major studios mask the profit motive beneath a veneer of artistic pretension, social conscience and quality control, like MGM's distinctive "high-key lighting" effects and the "European look" of Paramount films.[110] Producers of drive-in fare seldom bothered with such pretensions, preferring low budget and hastily produced films that aimed to turn a swift profit. Sam Katzman, who produced youth films like Rock Around the Clock and Teenage Crime

[110] David Cook, A History of Narrative Film (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996), p.284-8

Wave, summed up the spirit in which these films were made: "Let the arty guys get ulcers…. Lord knows, I'll never make an Academy Award movie, but then I'm just as happy to get my achievement plaque from the bank every year."[111]

Many companies found that producing films intended specifically for exhibition to youth audiences was financially expedient. Studios like Columbia, who released Katzman's films, had suffered because of the Paramount Decision's elimination of the 'B' film in the late 1940s. The 'B' film served the economic purpose of reducing studio overheads by keeping sound stages and crew in operation between major productions. Generally paired with more prestigious productions, these cheaply rendered films were the subordinate feature on double bills, and provided exhibitors - especially small neighbourhood theatres who drew a limited audience and thus "played out" even popular films within weeks - product to plug the gaps between major releases. Production costs were rising and profits dwindling by the early 1950s, and since studios could no longer guarantee exhibition at their own theatres, B movies were an increasingly risky venture.[112]

Hastily produced films that sought to profit from interest in topical issues or events showed studios that films need not be expensive, quality enterprises to make profits. Katzman, who by the early 1950s averaged seventeen feature films a year, never made a film that cost over $500,000 and never lost money on a film. His success was partly attributable to the haste of his productions. For example, within seven weeks of the start of the Korean conflict, Katzman's A Yank in Korea was ready to play in theatres.[113] In the 1950s, Katzman began producing films exclusively for youth audiences believing he had the right formula to attract them: "We got a new generation, but the same old glands."[114] That Katzman found in adolescents such a plentiful and enthusiastic audience for his relatively tame productions indicates that those "same old glands" were particularly repressed during the 1950s, and that young people were desperate to exercise

[111] Doherty, Teenpics, p.73

[112] Ibid., p.29-30

[113] Ibid, p.72-9

[114] Ibid., p.73

them. Inspired by reports of teenage rioting during screenings of Blackboard Jungle, Katzman's greatest success was Rock Around the Clock, which was made in five weeks, cost $300,000 and grossed $2.4 million worldwide.[115] Katzman's success proved that films marketed solely to the youth audience could garner enormous profits.

This success compelled independent companies like AIP and AA to pursue their own hasty, cheap youth films in earnest. As fledgling companies, they struggled to attract well-known actors, directors and writers, and to exhibit their product at established theatres. Although the Paramount Decision was designed to enable such companies to exhibit films in a wide range of theatres, historical ties remained between major studios and theatres they formerly owned and this obstructed competition. At best, these films played as secondary features of double bills, receiving a flat fee rather than a percentage of the gross. Exhibitors rarely promoted these independent films enthusiastically. Independent companies often found allies in drive-in theatres which generally had no such ties. Drive-ins similarly struggled to break through the historical ties that existed between producers and established exhibitors, as the major studios refused to release first-run product to drive-ins. The perception in the industry was that drive-ins were generally unsavoury sites in which to show serious, quality films. Drive-ins could exhibit films once they had finished their run at indoor theatres, but there was a widespread feeling within the industry that to premier a film at a drive-in tainted the product and doomed it to commercial failure.

Working closely with its exhibitors, especially drive-in operators, AIP pinpointed teenagers as the most profitable section of the market, following "strictly and simply a policy of directing [AIP's] attention to the supplying of teenager's entertainment demands."[116] As a 1957 article reported, this logic stemmed "from statistics showing the teenager to be the best picture-goer in the country at this time – the most consistent, the best equipped with leisure time and allowance money, the most gregariously inclined, and to be sure the most romantic – and likely to become gratifyingly more numerous as

[115] Ibid., p.81; Denisoff and Romanowski, p.65-8

[116] Doherty, Teenpics, p.155

time goes by."[117] Like drive-ins, AIP's coveting of the youth audience was strictly commercially motivated. Echoing Katzman, AIP Vice President Sam Arkoff eschewed artistic or political motives: "When we made these pictures I assure you that the farthest thought from our minds was that they'd wind up in a museum."[118]

To fulfil this commercial objective, these films firstly had to gain Code Office approval, which meant complying with the Office's ideological demands. Secondly, these films had to appeal to youths, the primary audience. This did not necessarily mean subverting Code Office ideology but, rather, accommodating readings that reflected young people's interests. As outlined earlier, these films included various narrative strains and thematic elements – like teenagers' battles against intransigent and unsympathetic adult authorities – and specific scenes and events – such as hot rod races, knife fights and rock n roll performances – intended to appeal to the young. Contrary to containment logic, these filmmakers recognised that a film's meanings were not solely determined by narrative closure, and that it was possible for spectators to derive pleasure and satisfaction from a film even if the ending did not suit their ideological interests.

Somewhat paradoxically, the Code Office endings that mandated the downfall of the delinquent youth protagonist potentially made the films more appealing to youths. An article on AIP in Motion Picture Herald in 1957 detailed the riddle of attempting to attract a psychologically complex audience like teenagers, who want cultural autonomy away from adult control but who are very wary of being patronised, and outlined the company's clandestine approach to luring teenagers to its films:

> To provide satisfactory screen material for the teenage audience without estranging their elders or their juniors, and without committing blunders such as have occurred in some of the other media, is the most exacting requirement AIP's policy imposes on its principals. AIP product must appeal to teenagers on a different basis than radio or television product available to them. It must not ever under any conditions seem to have been especially chosen for them, conditioned to their years, or equipped with special messages…. To give teenagers [the idea] they're being dealt with in a special way, as though they are different in some way than other people… is the last thing on earth a teenager wants to be told.[119]

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[117] Ibid., p.156

[118] McGee and Robertson, p.40

[119] Doherty, Teenpics, p.156

Thus, AIP sought to attract teenage audiences by not pitching its films directly at them. Instead, its trailers and posters were addressed to the "concerned American public," in the same disingenuous way that the prefaces to The Wild One and Blackboard Jungle were. AIP made films that dealt with teenage issues and problems, and that featured teenaged protagonists, but that seemed (and were) made by adults about teenagers. It was very important for the sense of youth cultural autonomy that it seemed to teenagers that they had chosen to frequent these films, and that the films were not necessarily tailored to meet the young's expectations. As John Ashley, the actor who starred in scores of AIP films including High School Caesar, Motorcycle Gang and Dragstrip Girl, recalled, the kids "went to those pictures and laughed at them. They didn't get that involved because the pictures were not well made. They were written by men who were in their late thirties or forties…. The kids got off on them but didn't think they were any better than I thought they were."[120] Part of these films' appeal to youths, then, was the preposterousness of adults' constructions of teenagers and youth culture. Hence it made sense for youth protagonists to be killed off in the last frames for it reinforced the notion that these films were not really designed *for* youths, but were only *about* them.

Despite attempting to conceal that these films were specifically intended for teenager, the filmmakers anticipated that young people would see them and read them as 'youth'; in other words, that young people would filter their spectatorship of these films through the prism of generational status rather than any other potential subjectivity. It is impossible to prove empirically how all, most or even any young viewers read these films, or if they applied a 'youth' reading to the films they saw at all. We cannot know for certain if young people experienced their status as 'youth' in a coherent and collective sense that would uniformly inflect all young people's readings. However, we can map a range of likely spectatorship modes in which teenagers could engage, taking into account extant spectatorship conditions and practices, and the specific texts that were read. From this, we can discern a likely index of youth spectatorship whilst bearing in mind Janet Staiger's warning that it is not predictability and convention but exception and perversity

[120] McGee and Robertson, p.61

that pervades actual spectatorship, "nor is any viewer always one kind of spectator," even within the same movie-going experience.[121]

Although, as Hall warns, within a single viewer there is a "maelstrom of potential subjectivities" that can cause divided, contradictory and indecisive readings, a particular viewing context can subordinate some potential subjectivities while activating others. Staiger calls these potential subjectivities "historically constructed 'imaginary selves', the subject positions taken up by individual readers and spectators." She emphasises that these subjectivities are crucial to film readings: "Whether I am thinking of myself as a professor or a woman or a neo-Marxist or an American influences what happens while I watch a movie."[122] Similarly, a young spectator watching a film that was targeted at youth among a predominantly teenaged audience at the drive-in was likely to sense his or her age most acutely, likely inflecting his or her reading of the film in crucial ways. Of course, we cannot know empirically how each individual viewer's experience of his or her youth identity manifested during spectatorship, but we can plot some of the likely modes of spectatorship while acknowledging that these modes are by no means comprehensive or quantifiable.

Modes of Youth Drive-In Spectatorship

One of these likely modes of spectatorship, as Mark Jancovich argues, was camp. He suggests that 1950s youths often read films in mocking, ironic ways, especially horror films that screened on television.[123] During the 1950s, in an effort to recuperate dwindling profits, film studios began selling old films from their vaults to television. Universal's vaults, for example, were widely plumbed, predominantly for their horror film cycle from the 1930s and 1940s, which gathered a cult following among 1950s youths. Television tended to deplete these films' capacity to frighten, as films like Bride of Frankenstein, Island of Lost Souls and The Mummy were beamed onto small screens

[121] Janet Staiger, Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000), p.21

[122] Ibid., p.31

[123] Mark Jancovich, Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.86-9

in people's living rooms, punctuated with commercial breaks and presented by a campy "monster of ceremonies." These presenters, Doherty argues, encouraged predominantly youth audiences watching these late night screenings to view the films as fun rather than scary, often peppering their monologues with teen lingo.[124] Out-dated special effects that were designed to shock audiences provoked laughter and ridicule in 1950s spectators, and this was one of the main attractions of these films.

The success of these programmes inspired studios like AIP to produce films that Doherty describes as 'weirdies'. The 'weirdie', Doherty suggests, combined generic elements of horror and science fiction films with juvenile delinquency films. Teenagers, themselves "hormonally disadvantaged" by the ravages of adolescence, often identified with "malformed and hyperthyroidic" horror protagonists. The weirdies focused on subject matter befitting adolescent viewers: sudden body mutations, sexual frustration (as Doherty puts it, "ripe desire for sexual congress mingled with a virginal dread of closure"), "psychological dislocation and social estrangement."[125] Typical film titles reflected the protagonists' alienation, which mirrored many adolescents' experiences of growing up and feeling out of place in adult-dominated society: I Was a Teenage Werewolf, I Was a Teenage Frankenstein, Teenagers from Outer Space, Teenage Monster.

AIP's I Was a Teenage Werewolf was the paradigmatic weirdie. The film centres on Tony (played by Michael Landon) a popular but mixed-up teenager who struggles to control his anger. The opening scene of the film sees Tony slugging a fellow teenager while his peers gather around. When the police halt the fight and disperse the crowd, Tony's opponent alleges that Tony had overreacted to a "friendly tap on the shoulder." Despite clearly being beaten, Tony fought relentlessly, even when his opponent refused to keep fighting. Sullen Tony, who initially refuses to talk to the police, eventually admits that he started the fight. Betraying uneasiness about his sexuality, in his defence Tony states: "I don't like to be touched, especially from behind." Jancovich argues that this is not necessarily a homosexual fear; Tony's "hatred of being touched is a fear of being

[124] Doherty, Teenpics, p.149

[125] Ibid., p.146-7

feminised, and this fear is directly associated with his refusal to conform."[126] His girlfriend and the police advise him to seek professional help, but Tony insists that he will treat his temper "my way." He has a stubborn inability "to do things the other fellow's way," as his father tells him, which stems in part from Tony's disgust at his father's menial occupation that forces him to work night shifts and acquiesce to a bullying foreman. Tony's refusal to conform situates him among rebels like Jim Stark and Artie West in rejecting emasculating hegemonic masculinity. When his girlfriend's parents berate him for not having a respectable job and good prospects, Tony scoffs at such aspirations, citing the example of a 'respectable' local bank clerk who stole money and then lost it gambling.

After beating a good friend following a light-hearted prank and being ostracised by his peer group, Tony agrees to consult a psychiatrist. The film transforms from a regular juvenile delinquency film when Dr Brandon intervenes. Dr Brandon, seeing Tony as symptomatic of his theory that "mankind is on the verge of destroying itself," decides to use his patient to prove "that the only hope for mankind is to hurl it back to its primitive dawn, to start all over again." He performs hypnosis on Tony and regresses him first to early childhood and then to a primordial state. From this point, Tony, when primitive emotions like anger, lust and fear are provoked, transforms into a werewolf and attacks his prey. As a werewolf, he kills one of his friends in the woods at night. Tony complains to Dr Brandon that he feels "peculiar," but Brandon is too enamoured with his own experiment to listen to Tony's pleas. When he voyeuristically watches a female gymnast in the school gym, a loud bell directly above him shocks Tony. The mix of lust and anger transforms Tony into a werewolf who mauls the girl. Still in his werewolf state, Tony charges through the school grounds where fellow students recognise his clothes. Police chase Tony through the woods and track him down to Dr Brandon's clinic, where they shoot him, but not before Tony has mauled the doctor who mutated him.

I Was a Teenage Werewolf offers an indictment of adult attempts to correct youthful deviance. Although in the final frame a policeman decrees that it is "not for man to interfere with the ways of God," the film promotes a reading that is less religious; that it is not for adults to interfere in the ways of teenagers. A recurring phrase that policemen,

[126] Jancovich, p.208

counsellors and Dr Brandon utter to Tony is that to cure him they "need to get really inside you." Early in therapy, Dr Brandon promises to uncover Tony's "true self" and tells Tony that "you will no longer be disturbed or troubled because you will be you." Tony's headmaster praises his behaviour that appears to have drastically improved following his therapy – if only because his werewolf incarnation has subsumed his rage – and tells him that she always knew if someone could "really get inside him," he could be a real credit to his school. Rather than instilling discipline, order and conformity in Tony, however, these efforts to adjust his psychology merely transfer and intensify his uncontrollable rage to his alter-ego. Adult attempts to curb his anti-social and delinquent tendencies, and make him a "credit" in adults' eyes, create, quite literally, a monster. Tony's fear of conformity (and of letting others "get inside him") is completely justified, because, by attempting to conform to behavioural norms and repress his natural aggression, his repressed instincts return in the form of a primordial beast. As Tony's father attests when he says that Tony was a good, co-operative boy – "you only had to ask him the right way" – the fault is not Tony's but an unsympathetic educational, law-enforcing and psychotherapeutic system for not being able to accommodate Tony's difference.[127]

Producer Herman Cohen admitted that he tailored the film to teenage audiences by portraying the teen protagonist as a victim of an intolerant and demented adult disciplinary system. Exemplifying AIP's commercial imperative, I Was a Teenage Werewolf's success was more the product of careful market research than artistic endeavour. After producing a commercially unsuccessful drama Crimes of Passion starring Barbara Stanwyck and Sterling Hayden, Cohen studied the film industry to ensure his next film would be profitable. "I had heard that 62% of movie audience was between fifteen and thirty," he said, "and I knew that the movies that were grossing well were horror and rock n roll pictures. So I decided to combine them with an exploitation title."[128] Cohen felt that depicting the teenage monster sympathetically, with his sudden body mutations, sexual angst and spurts of hair growth, "would appeal to a teenage

[127] I Was a Teenage Werewolf. Dir. Gene Fowler, Jr. Perf. Michael Landon, Whit Bissell, Yvonne Lime. American International Pictures, 1957.

[128] Doherty, Teenpics, p.161

audience… which it did."[129] Released in June 1957, I Was a Teenage Werewolf, which cost $150,000, grossed over $2 million, and caused traffic jams at some drive-in theatres.[130] This phenomenal success inspired Cohen to make a very similar film with a female protagonist this time, Blood of Dracula, and inspired AIP to initiate a cycle of weirdies.

Aiming at "a not-too-discerning young audience,"[131] AIP produced its weirdies at very low cost, often devoting a bigger budget to marketing the film than producing it. As a result, these films typically seemed cheap and artificial, with poorly realised special effects. As Jancovich argues, this most likely enhanced these films' camp value to young audiences:

> In fact, the ludicrousness and artificial aspects of these films often evokes the same kind of affection as their pathetic and monstrous outsiders, and in this sense, the form and content were often directly linked. As a result, it is interesting that when the big studios tried to get in on the act – for example, 20th Century Fox's The Fly (1958) – it was the most ludicrous aspects of these films that were both the most effective and the most affectionately remembered.[132]

The low production values of AIP's cheaply rendered weirdies frequently won audiences' affections. One such affectionately remembered production was Beast with One Million Eyes. Because the film's budget was only $29,000 and director Roger Corman did not have enough money to construct and shoot a monster, he decided to shoot the film from the monster's point of view, so that the monster would never be in shot. When he handed the footage to AIP's producers Sam Arkoff and James Nicholson, who were responsible for editing, they had already made posters depicting the beast, and thought that Corman had forgotten to provide the reel with the monster footage on it. When Corman informed them there was no such footage and that he could not shoot the beast within budget, Arkoff and Nicholson took a kettle, punctured some holes in it, wrapped it in a tattered tea cosy and boiled some water. Shooting close-up with a soft-focus lens, the steam

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[129] McGee and Robertson, p.94

[130] Doherty, Teenpics, p.160

[131] Ibid., p.146

[132] Jancovich, p.201

obscured the kettle enough, they felt, to make it look like the monster on the poster.[133] Unfortunately, many audiences were not impressed with these special effects. On the other hand they were enamoured with their farcical crudeness.

Such fondness for ineptitude fits Andrew Ross's definition of camp. Ross suggests that the "camp effect" is created "when the products… of a much earlier mode of production, which has lost its power to dominate cultural meanings, become available, in the present, for redefinition according to contemporary codes of taste."[134] Camp, in other words, is the celebration of obsolescence; the comical parading of artefacts that once symbolised potency but now seem fey and ridiculous. Recontextualised into the small television screens of suburban homes, Universal's horror films' arcane special effects initially designed to shock lost their cultural impact, lost their ability to terrify. To 1950s teenagers, part of the joke was imagining viewers of their parents' generation falling for the illusion. The weirdie cycle of AIP exploited this. AIP recontextualised Universal's most 'terrifying' figures – werewolves, vampires, zombies and Frankenstein monsters – into the world of 1950s teenagers and these films did not horrify; rather, they underscored the obsolescence of these monsters that had terrified audiences of an earlier era. As James Nicholson said in response to criticism of his monster films: "Teenagers, who comprise our largest audience, recognise [the absurdly fantastical depiction of AIP's monsters] and laugh at the caricatures we represent, rather than shrink in terror. Adults, more serious-minded perhaps, often miss the point of the joke."[135] Indeed, teenagers' camp readership of the weirdies, which was incomprehensible to adults, emphasised the generation gap. As an exasperated school representative told a film industry-sponsored convention when the discussion turned to horror films, "instead of shocking audiences, they amused them. They're comedies."[136]

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[133] Sam Arkoff interview, bonus feature on DVD The Cool and the Crazy. Dir. William Witney. Perf. Dick Bakalyan, Scott Marlowe, Dick Jones. [1958] DVD. Rainbow Films Holding, 2004.

[134] Andrew Ross, No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), p.139

[135] Doherty, p.160

[136] Ibid.

The depiction of naïve and often demented adult authority figures in these films further emphasised the generation gap and invited youth audiences to deride adult authority. For instance, a common plot device of the weirdie, as we have seen in I Was a Teenage Werewolf with Dr Brandon's disastrous intrusion into Tony's psyche, concerns figures of esteem and authority causing the monsterism. In their incompetent attempts to control adolescents, these figures inadvertently create monsters they cannot control. In I Was a Teenaged Frankenstein, for example, respected but deranged scientist Dr Frankenstein believes that "the old are dying and dead. The whole trend is toward death. Only in youth is there any hope for salvation." Salvaging a youthful corpse from the wreckage of a teenage joy-riding accident, Frankenstein builds his teenage saviour complete with body parts obtained from a high school athletics team killed in an airplane crash; a wrestler's hands and a football star's leg. The doctor frustrates the monster with his heavy-handed parenting, berating the monster to "speak! You've got a civil tongue in your head; I know because I sewed it there myself" and limiting his movements: "Don't badger me! You will walk among people when I feel the time is right." When the doctor proposes to dismantle the monster and reconstruct him for an overseas trip, the monster refuses. When the doctor shouts the classical parental refrain "I know what's best for you!" the monster finally rebels, hurling his maker into an alligator pit.[137] The film situates the doctor as a parental figure and encourages teenagers to identify with the monster and revel in the fantasy of flinging an over-bearing adult authority figure to their death.

Weirdies like I Was a Teenage Frankenstein exemplified the camp appeal of these films for youths. For example, in one scene, Frankenstein, complaining that his face was just a mass of scar tissue, ventures to the local lover's lane where he tears a young Romeo from the arms of his screaming girlfriend to procure his face. Playing to a predominantly youth audience at the drive-in, which had a well-earned reputation for hosting passionate embraces, such as that of the young Romeo and his girlfriend, the scene's self-reflexivity was likely to engender recognition and affection among young audiences. Such self-reflexivity was common among drive-in films. In The Amazing Colossal Man, for

[137] I Was a Teenage Frankenstein. Dir. Herbert Strock. Perf. Whit Bissell, Gary Conway, Phyllis Coates. American International Pictures, 1957

example, the Colossal Man tears apart a Las Vegas drive-in. An amorous couple in Attack of the Puppet People go to a drive-in to watch The Amazing Colossal Man. The most self-reflexive weirdie was AIP's How to Make a Monster. In this film, a heartless AIP producer decides that "the monster cycle is over," pointing out that nobody finds the monsters scary anyway. Preferring to make rock n roll musicals, the producer fires the make-up department responsible for making the monsters for I Was a Teenage Werewolf and I Was a Teenage Frankenstein. In revenge, the head make-up artist hypnotises the teenaged actors that played the monsters and compels them to kill AIP's executives. Ultimately, the teenaged actors rebel against the make-up artist's attempts to control them by burning down his museum of monster waxworks, which parallels I Was a Teenage Frankenstein in encouraging the young to indulge in a revenge fantasy against controlling parental figures.[138]

These films' self-reflexivity facilitated the camp effect by foregrounding their conceit. When poorly costumed and unrealistic monsters attacked romancing teenagers at the drive-in, the youth drive-in audience was less likely to experience a heightened sense of fear at the possibility that a monster could be lurking in the shadows, a common horror film ploy, than experience a heightened sense of watching a fictional film. Moreover, teenagers were likely to deride these films for their feeble attempts to horrify, laughing at these films' adult creators who intended their monsters to scare audiences. In the context of the distracted environment of the drive-in which constantly diverted audience attention away from the screen, viewers were also less likely to be lured into the suspension of disbelief necessary to be horrified.

The viewing context of the drive-in was also likely to influence young viewers to be derisive of – and possibly antagonistic towards – figures of adult authority. Incompetent, ignorant and unjust authority figures were common to not only weirdies but most drive-in films made for youth. One such typical character that frequented rock n roll films was the intolerant police officer, school official or parent who campaigns to ban 'the bop'. Films like Rock Around the Clock, Rock, Pretty Baby and Don't Knock the Rock all pitted well-meaning youths against prejudiced adults who were trying to

[138] How to Make a Monster. Dir. Herbert Strock. Perf. Robert Harris, Gary Conway, Gary Clarke. American International Pictures, 1958

suppress rock n roll. AIP's Shake, Rattle and Rock, for example, concerns citizen's group SPRARCAY's (Society for the Prevention of Rock and Roll Corruption of American Youth) attempt to prohibit what they describe as the "cannibalistic celebrations" and "utter depravity" of rock n roll.[139] Viewed among a predominantly youthful audience sympathetic to rock n roll at the drive-in (which probably piped rock n roll across its lot prior to the screening), such a depiction was likely to provoke vociferous derision.

Another likely influence on youth's readership of these films was advertising. AIP devoted as much, if not more, attention to marketing their films as to producing them. To promote their films, James Nicholson and Sam Arkoff resuscitated vaudevillian promotional techniques to attract audiences to their films. As Arkoff stated, "anybody who doesn't recognise [the film industry's] carnival aspects is being a horse's ass."[140] Of primary importance was the poster. Typically, producers would design the poster and distribute a few copies to exhibitors who would display them as coming attractions. Only if the poster provoked the requisite level of interest, thus guaranteeing the film's profitability, would the film be made. Hence, films were produced hastily to capitalise on the buzz that posters created.

Like the films they promoted, advertisements were subject to a regulatory code and were similarly circumscribed in the degree of salaciousness and violence they could display. AIP and AA pushed their advertising to the boundary of Code regulations; while their film content tended to be conservative to avoid the wrath of the Code office and state censor boards, their advertising was frequently more risqué. The main reason for their brazen advertising was that the Advertising Code Administration was less effective in regulating content than its motion picture equivalent. Since 1946, when Howard Hughes successfully defied the Administration's ban on promotional material for The Outlaw, the Advertising Code Administration had struggled to exert influence over industry practices.[141] Gordon White, director of the Administration's New York office

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[139] Shake, Rattle and Rock. Dir. Edward Cahn. Perf. Touch Connors, Fats Domino, Margaret Dumont. American International Pictures, 1956

[140] Arkoff interview, The Cool and the Crazy

[141] Janet Staiger, "Announcing Wares, Winning Patrons, Voicing Ideals: Thinking About the History and Theory of Film Advertising" in Cinema Journal, 29, 3 (1990), p.16

during the 1950s, stressed during his testimony to the Senate Subcommittee investigating juvenile delinquency and motion pictures that his office was able to prohibit advertising copy that was "readily unpassable" but struggled with the "gray zone," copy "that was on the line between acceptable and non-acceptable under the Advertising Code."[142] The Senate Subcommittee bemoaned the "gray zone" standard, quoting a Journal of Social Therapy editorial that linked movie advertising and sex crimes to illustrate the gray zone's effects:

> Supercharged sex is the dominant keynote [in film publicity]. Bosomy, carnally glorified heroines are portrayed in the throes of passion. Couples are locked in frenetic embrace suggesting an inevitability of coition. Purplish prose is keyed to a feverish tempo to celebrate the naturalness of seduction, the condonability of adultery, the spontaneity of adolescent relations. Boy gets girl, or vice versa, is the perennial theme. The gun and the bludgeon are complementary symbols as sadism is injected into the aphrodisiac dose. Violence, excitement, suspense, and climax are arrayed in hardly subtle paraphrases of the course of physical intimacy.[143]

Had it been written two years later, this editorial could have been describing AIP's advertising. Such provocative advertising, befitting the complexities of luring youth audiences, was designed to attract youth audiences to their films without addressing teenagers directly. The strategy that companies like AIP and AA employed to titillate audiences yet placate the toothless Advertising Code Administration, was to present potentially inflammatory content as public education and awareness. Thus, advertising always addressed a 'concerned public'; adults who stood opposed to the menacing youths who these films documented. The advertising copy for Teenage Crime Wave, for example, stressed the film's public service, addressing adult audiences (the "aroused public") directly: "'Over 25% of the crimes committed in this country are perpetrated by teenagers.' Only an aroused public can put an end to this. We hope this picture will open your eyes." Contradicting this spirit of 'concern', the film's publicists urged exhibitors to display weapons commonly associated with juvenile delinquency, like

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[142] U.S. Congress, Motion Pictures, p.23

[143] Ibid., p.20

"zip guns" and switchblade knives, alongside provocative stills from the film to stir controversy and further publicity.[144]

Not only posters and lobby displays but film trailers too deployed these strategies. The trailer for Teenage Doll is typical in that it addressed itself explicitly to adults but sought to appeal to prospective youth audiences. The trailer opens with a shot of text promising: "You will remember Teenage Doll!" The overly-stern, campy announcer makes it clear that the adult spectator is the object of the trailer's address:

> Teenage Doll is not a pretty picture. It can't be pretty and still be true. Packed with shocking realities of what is happening today in *your* city, *your* town, *your* neighbourhood; thousands of girls are turning into teenage dolls…. girls who learn the naked facts of life too young, too soon and the hard way. Hell-cats in tight pants running in packs, hunting down any girl who dare defies their jungle code.[145]

The trailer sought to alarm adults; in this way, it could claim that it was providing the service of informing the public about the "shocking realities of today." However, images of scantily clad teenage girls and switchblade-wielding juvenile delinquents engaged in scenes of passion and violence underlay these words, betraying the real intention to titillate and exploit rather than educate. The anxiety that youth culture and behaviour seems to inspire in menaced adults was likely to appeal to the young because it underscored youth's power to upset and discomfit adults, even though the trailer invites an adult spectator to scrutinise and condemn youth.

Scholars have paid scant attention to the relationship between advertising and readership. Analysing Hollywood marketing strategies, Steve Neale stresses that advertising is crucial to establishing and disseminating generic conventions and audience expectations. A film poster or trailer, for instance, can relate to audiences in shorthand a genre film's "narrative image" – which is the "cinema's anticipatory reply to the question, 'What is the film like?'" – once sets of labels, terms and expectations are widely established.[146] Eric Schaefer similarly argues that advertising for exploitation films

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[144] Doherty, Teenpics, p.135

[145] This trailer is included on the video Teenage Doll. Dir. Roger Corman. Perf. June Kenney, Fay Spain, John Brinkley. [1957] Videocassette. Englewood Entertainment, 1997.

[146] Steve Neale, "Questions of Genre" in Barry Keith Grant (ed), Film Genre Reader II (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), p.162-3

created audience expectations but, generally lacking recognisable stars, directors and even generic conventions to relate in shorthand, exploitation films' advertising focused on the particular thrill or emotion the film aroused. Trailers and posters paraded scantily-clad women, medical curiosities or exotic cultures, and emphasised the shocks, pleasures and amazements the audience could expect to feel. For example, the poster for 1934 film Gow about the native peoples of the South Pacific promises: "Actual scenes you will never forget!" Surrounding stills of native warriors in battle dress and topless native women, the text blurbs tell audiences to expect: "Virgin savagery… cannibals and headhunters in action…Gow screams with savage action… See… savage orgies of man-eating humans!… See what actually happens at a cannibal sacrificial ceremony!" Generally, this type of advertising encouraged the audience to expect the film to provide a series of spectacular shocks rather than a coherent plot line as genre film advertising would.[147]

Befitting their advertising, exploitation films tended to dwell more on spectacle than narrative. Even lengthy fictional exploitation films like Narcotics and Reefer Madness struggled to sustain cohesive narratives, focusing instead on sensationalist scenes of people driven insane by drugs. One poster for Narcotic creates the expectation for a series of spectacles by showing a barely-clad young female with a pipe in her hands leaning over a table full of reefers, pills and powder, as the text promises: "One Night of Bliss… for a 1,000 [sic] Nights in Hell! Women Crave for It… Men will slave for It, Both will Die for It!!!"[148] In privileging spectacle, exploitation films ran counter to the "better film" movement initiated in the 1930s that sought to elevate public taste by promoting more cerebral films that told "good stories." Moral groups condemned exploitation films' appeal to 'lower' pleasures of the body but, because exploiteers chose to produce their films outside of Hollywood and the constraints of the Production Code,

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[147] Eric Schaefer, "Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!": A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), p.103-19, 276

[148] Ibid., p.232

there was little the mainstream film industry could do to modify the content of exploitation films.[149]

Unlike exploitation films, films produced for the youth drive-in market were bound by certain Production and Advertising Code restrictions, but like exploitation films they often lacked marketable stars and directors, unless these were rock n roll pictures that featured performances from the likes of Eddie Cochran, Little Richard and Chuck Berry. Thus, following established exploitation advertising techniques, advertising for these films focused on the lurid, violent and titillating to entice audiences. The bad reputation of drive-ins was not only attributable to the alleged salacious behaviour of their patrons but also to the perceived low brow pleasures that audiences experienced at the drive-in. Unlike the type of audiences that the "better film" movement desired, drive-in audiences were reputed to engage in spectatorship practices that were not conducive to cerebral pleasures. There is some truth to this reputation, at least to the degree that, as we have seen, the drive-in's encouragement of an active and distracted form of spectatorship defied bourgeois ideals of disciplined, silent and passive spectatorship.

Just as we cannot empirically know how individual spectators negotiated the conditions of the drive-in when viewing films, we cannot know how advertisements inflected viewers' readership, if at all. But it is likely, as Neale and Schaefer argue, that advertisements created expectations in viewers and that these expectations potentially framed readership. Coupled with the drive-in environment that distracted viewer attention and militated against absorption in narrative films, it is likely that advertisements' emphases on spectacle alerted viewers to moments to look out for, moments of attraction against the drive-in environment's prevailing distraction. Typical of this kind of advertising, the poster for AIP's Dragstrip Riot depicts a leather-clad motorcycle gang in pursuit of a hot-rod, promising: "Murder… at 120 miles an hour!" and urging audiences to watch for certain spectacular scenes of interest: "SEE Hot Rods vs Motorcycles… SEE The Beach Party Rumble!"[150]

In alerting spectators to particular scenes and moments, advertising invited spectators to approach the drive-in as a "cinema of attractions," a term Tom Gunning

[149] Ibid., p.156

[150] McGee and Robertson, p.56

uses to characterise certain types of early film exhibition. Discussing early cinematic exhibition practices that preceded the dominance of narrative film, Gunning posits that the cinema of attractions offered audiences brief episodic scenes that sought to stimulate sensations rather than engage intellect:

> Rather than being an involvement with narrative action or empathy with character psychology, the cinema of attractions solicits a highly conscious awareness of the film image engaging the viewer's curiosity. The spectator does not get lost in a fictional world and its drama, but remains aware of the act of looking, the excitement of curiosity and its fulfilment. Through a variety of formal means, the images of the cinema of attractions rush forward to meet their viewers. These devices range from the implied collision of the early railroad films to the performance style of the same period, when actors nodded and gestured at the camera… or when a showman lecturer presented the views to the audience. This cinema addresses and holds the spectator, emphasising the act of display. In fulfilling this curiosity, it delivers a generally brief dose of scopic pleasure.[151]

The key differences between this type of cinematic experience and the drive-in were that drive-in films generally did not directly address the spectator and the drive-in's distraction militated against "holding the spectator." However, the drive-in did encourage the viewer to experience "a highly conscious awareness of the film image… emphasising the act of display." Although drive-ins never utilised presenters and lecturers to frame spectatorship, in a far less direct and immediate sense drive-in advertising performed this function in alerting spectators to moments of "scopic pleasure" to which to pay attention. Such moments included Teenage Crime Wave's spectacular depiction of teenage criminals in violent confrontation with adult authorities, High School Hellcats' young girls brazenly defying codes of feminine sexual restraint and various rock n roll films' star performers in films like Carnival Rock, Hot Rod Gang and High School Confidential.

In other words, the sensationalist advertising for drive-in films coupled with the distracted environment of the drive-in encouraged spectators to view films in episodes – as periodic scenes of interest – rather than as a coherent narrative. Of course, for many drive-in patrons, the particular film was secondary to the act of going to the drive-in itself. For these viewers, the advertisement was unlikely to exert the same influence on readership because they were not attracted to the film by the advertisement. Although such spectators would not have the same expectations of specific scenes and moments,

[151] Gunning, p.121

they probably understood the generic features of youth drive-in films and expected to see moments of inter-generational conflict and subcultural ritual.

As we saw earlier, critics derided drive-in audiences for not being discerning about the films they patronised and drive-in films for being formulaic, repetitious and simplistic. Doherty points out, though, that many critics argue that in rock n roll films, for instance, the narrative was so execrable that it merely interrupted performances. But he suggests that these critics miss the point that the meandering, predictable narrative enabled audience interaction and youth cultural ritual, providing "the perfect opportunity to prowl the theatre, chat with friends, and make dates after the show. Or, as Richard Thompson said of Sam Katzman's *oeuvre*: '[It] makes perfect drive-in fare, because you can look up at any point and comprehend it without prior knowledge of the plot.'"[152] The repetitiveness and simplicity of these films allowed spectators to comprehend individual moments in particular films without needing to have the context established. Returning attention to the film after a theatre prowl or romantic clinch, youth spectators could easily grasp generically conventional scenes of teenagers battling unsympathetic and bewildered parents and authorities, of youngsters enacting peer group rituals to establish status and influence, of rock n roll performers stirring enthusiastic audiences, and so on.

Although we can surmise that the drive-in's distracted environment worked to divert attention away from the screen and engage viewer attention only periodically, we cannot make definitive statements about the extent of this engagement nor can we assume that all spectators experienced a uniform ratio of attention to distraction across all drive-in viewing experiences; factors such as whether one was hanging out with friends or on a date, whether going steady or on a first date, were likely to affect a spectator's level of engagement with the film. But we can assume that the distracting environment of the drive-in disrupted the flow of the narrative, encouraging viewers to employ methods of spectatorship that differed from those that characterised what critics refer to as classical Hollywood cinema. Armed with sophisticated and active methods of camp and ironic readership, and fortified by an inherent suspicion of adult authorities and adult condescension towards youth, teenagers utilised the drive-in in complex ways. Despite Code mandates and industry pressures that sought to contain the ideological content of

[152] Doherty, Teenpics, p.97-8

films within the confines of a film's narrative closure, youths were able, with the encouragement of the unique conditions of watching films at the drive-in, to glean meanings that were not determined by narrative closure. Reliance on episodic thrill over all-encompassing narrative satisfaction enabled the young to challenge containment logic and celebrate moments of inter-generational conflict and youth cultural ritual that bolstered teenagers' sense of themselves as a distinctive, potent and autonomous cultural amalgam.

Chapter 4

Rock n Roll, Black Masculinity and the Limitations of Performative Subversion

"If I was white, do you know how huge I'd be? If I was white, I'd be able to sit on top of the White House! A lot of things they would do for Elvis and Pat Boone, they wouldn't do for me."

- Little Richard[1]

"Chuck Berry is a country singer. People put everybody in categories, black, white, this. Now if Chuck Berry was white, with the lyrics he writes, he would be the top country star in the world."

- Jimmy Witherspoon[2]

"I'm white
Inside
But that don't help my case
Cos I
Can't hide
What is in my face"

- Louis Armstrong, "(What Did I Do to Be So) Black and Blue"

Rock n roll music, like the drive-in movie theatre, was a vital space for the formation of the youth culture. As adult culture's well-documented revulsion to the emergence of rock n roll suggests, the music's combination of sexuality and interracial cultural exchange comprised the youth culture's most controversial expression of its

[1] Gilbert Rodman, Elvis After Elvis: The Posthumous Career of a Living Legend (London: Routledge, 1996), p.49

[2] George Lipsitz, Class and Culture in Cold War America: "A Rainbow at Midnight" (New York: Praeger, 1981), p.215

generational distinctiveness. The drive-in theatre itself was tremendously controversial for its 'borderland' atmosphere; situated on the 'green-belt' between cities, suburbs and rural areas, the 'passion pits' drew socially diverse youths together in the same physical space. In the South, this mixing of racially diverse youngsters was particularly explosive given that the drive-in was one of the few integrated public spaces. Yet, to a greater extent than even drive-in theatres, rock n roll's illicit mixing of young blacks and whites threatened Cold War America's racial order.

The 'Negro problem' posed the most obvious impediment to the efficacy of the containment narrative's myth of social harmony and consensus. Proclamations trumpeting 'American democracy' from American diplomats, who were determined to win a public relations battle on the world stage for the hearts of nations that Communism 'threatened', rang hollow in the face of African Americans' political disenfranchisement under Jim Crow segregation. The international condemnation of lynching embarrassed efforts to sell the concept of the American Dream to 'coloured' nations recently liberated from brutal colonial rule. Domestically, the exclusion of blacks from the suburbs and their increasing ghettoisation in impoverished urban enclaves exposed notions of a universal 'middle class' as fiction. For the American 'Golden Age', blacks were the unassimilable remainder, the hard kernel of the real shadowing and undermining boasts that American postwar prosperity had defeated poverty and achieved social equality.

The shocking and controversial rise of rock n roll in the mid-1950s threatened to catapult America's troubled race relations to the forefront of public discourse. In this sense, this incendiary cultural form menaced America's containment narrative that insisted on the success of cultural pluralism yet excised blacks and black culture from mainstream America. From within the hegemonic bloc of 1950s America, cries that rock n roll constituted a breach abounded; its performers and promoters were condemned for playing "the basic, heavy-beat music of Negroes. It appeals to the base in man, brings out animalism and vulgarity."[3] In short, rock n roll seemed to embody precisely the kind of

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[3] Asa Carter, quoted in Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave, Anti-Rock: The Opposition to Rock 'n' Roll (New York: Da Capo Press, 1990), p.41

cultural miscegenation that Jim Crow laws in the South, white-only suburban migration in the North, and the exclusion of blacks from 1950s mainstream culture, worked to prohibit.

This cultural miscegenation seemed a heartening prospect for black activists agitating for social change since the frustration and disappointment of the Double-V campaign of World War Two.[4] Initially suspicious and critical of rock n roll, even Martin Luther King conceded to an audience of black disc jockeys: "you have paved the way for social and political change by creating a powerful, cultural bridge between black and white. School integration is much easier now that [students] have a common music, a common language, and enjoy the same dances."[5] Many activists, and later, historians, echoed King's sentiments. Todd Gitlin, for example, points out that rock n roll's breakthrough in 1955 coincided with the initiation of the Montgomery Bus Boycotts, conceding that the "parallels between rock and civil rights were far from exact, but such imperfect coincidences are the updrafts on which the zeitgeist spreads its wings. What news photographers and television did for civil rights, breaking blacks out of their social ghetto, radio did in a different way for musical rights."[6]

Rock n roll was undoubtedly a catalyst for social change in postwar America. It inspired countless young whites to make incursions into the culture of the racial other and begin to dismantle – however imprecisely and unsystematically – some of the barriers of racial segregation. The danger with emphasising rock n roll's promise of integration, however, is that it obscures the structures of racial oppression, both economic and symbolic, that rock n roll reproduced. Rock n roll was not immune to America's long and troubling history of the commercialisation of racist stereotypes of black people for the entertainment and profit of whites. This makes crucial the question of the extent to which rock n roll's perpetuation of historically embedded racist stereotypes and structures of economic exploitation outweigh its work in bringing black and white youngsters together.

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[4] See Eric Lott, "Double V, Double-Time: Bebop's Politics of Style" in Callaloo, v.11, n.3 (1988), p.597-603

[5] David Roediger, Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p.213

[6] Todd Gitlin, Years of Hope, Days of Rage (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), p.39

Historian George Lipsitz posits rock n roll as an overwhelmingly progressive force for social change in the 1950s. In his article "Land of a Thousand Dances" he argues:

> Rock and roll's popularity reflected changes in race relations as white teenagers accepted as their own a music that originated among racial minorities. It reflected changes within minority communities as black and brown musicians staked unprecedented claims for themselves as participants in shaping American popular culture.[7]

Lipsitz is certainly right to claim that rock n roll embraced the participation of racial minority musicians to an unprecedented degree, and that this participation allowed these musicians to influence American popular culture to an extent unthinkable in previous decades. But one must question whether whites accepting (or appropriating) the music of racial minorities "as their own" reflected *changes* in race relations or indicated instead a perpetuation of the historical exploitation of both the labour and culture of racial minorities. If the visibility of "black and brown" musicians in 1950s rock n roll was a sign of unproblematic equality, one must further ask: did this participation promise integration for minorities and the opportunity to act as full "participants in shaping American culture"? On what (and on whose) terms could racial minorities become "participants" and be "accepted" by white teenagers?

Exploring these questions will help complicate notions of a bound, unified 1950s youth culture. The axes of social difference that segment the youth culture warn us against conceiving a systematic, politically cohesive cultural formation. Rather, 1950s youth culture comprised an uneasy amalgam of socially diverse groups, unified by an imprecise sense of generational kinship, and coalescing around certain media texts, cultural rituals and commercial practices unique to them. The segmentation of the youth culture along racial lines is highlighted in rock n roll. Middle class whites were attracted to rock n roll for its promise to deliver them from the monochromatic boredom of white suburban America and provide something more dangerous and thrilling than the 'culture of abundance' offered. For young blacks, rock n roll offered a means of escaping material impoverishment and some of the constrictions of segregation. But blacks wishing to

[7] George Lipsitz, "Land of a Thousand Dances: Youth, Minorities, and the Rise of Rock and Roll" in Lary May (ed.), Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p.268

perform and even consume rock n roll confronted tremendous obstacles impeding their participation. To a large extent, whites' romanticised reception and, at times, warped imitation of the dangerous, thrilling 'other' they coveted added to these obstacles. To make matters more complex, as I will argue in the next chapter, ingenious strategies black performers devised to negotiate the white music industry often became mimetic fodder, even for progressively minded whites.

As we have come to understand, blackness is not an inherent, essential component of fixed identity but rather a performative fiction produced out of its material relation - and historically and mythologically embedded opposition - to whiteness. As Frantz Fanon asserts, "not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man."[8] The exigencies of white racism have historically shaped, in one way or another, blacks' performance of 'blackness'. Along with others seeking upward social mobility in the white-controlled entertainment industry, black rock n rollers confronted tremendous obstacles. Black rock n roll performers faced the fraught proposition of negotiating their black identity through dominant cultural meanings ascribed to blackness in order to be commercially successful. Thus the ground upon which these "minority" performers "participated" in (white) American popular culture was riddled with fault lines. The innovative strategies black performers devised to negotiate these fault lines have indeed shaped American popular culture, but one ought not minimise the conditions out of which these strategies emerged. Inevitably, the racist structures that girded Cold War America constricted the performative parameters – and the "acceptable" limits – of blackness for black rock n rollers.

The Phobogenic Black Body

Examples of dominant cultural stereotypes representing the black body as different, as 'other', suffuse the history of American interracial relations. From the earliest justifications of slavery, representations of blacks as primitive savages, ungodly heathens, inhumane brutes, bestial rapists and libidinous demons have pervaded American culture. As Toni Morrison explains:

[8] Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p.110

> Black slavery enriched the country's creative possibilities. For in that construction of blackness *and* enslavement could be found not only the non-free but also, with the dramatic polarity created by skin color, the projection of the not-me. The result was a playground for the imagination. What rose up out of collective needs to allay internal fears and to rationalize external exploitation was an American Africanism – a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm and desire that is uniquely American.[9]

This "brew of darkness, otherness, alarm and desire" was grounded in fear. This brew cast, as Frantz Fanon suggests, the "Negro [as] a phobogenic object, a stimulus to anxiety."[10] Fear would govern interracial relations from slavery through emancipation; in a sense it continues to shape black-white relations. Constructions of phobogenic blacks have functioned historically to justify whites' circumscription of blacks' freedoms.

Under slavery, a range of disciplinary practices were mobilised to alleviate fear of the black body. Complex processes of white surveillance and black display governed relations between master and slave. Saidiya Hartman argues that under slavery, "to the degree the [enslaved] body speaks it is made to speak the master's truth and augments his power through the imposition and intensification of pain."[11] Hartman acknowledges that slaves employed tactics to transform encounters with the master into surreptitious acts of resistance. But she emphasises that such resistance was indivisible from the fact that these performances were staged to please the master, whose ultimate dominance over the enslaved body was secured in a regime of discipline, terror and violence. Hartman stresses that "since acts of resistance exist within the context of relations of domination and are not external to them, they acquire their character from these relations, and vice versa."[12]

The master inscribed his dominance onto the black body through his coercion of forced performances, such as slave singing and dancing for the master's entertainment, which visibly displayed and ritualised slave subjugation. Masters "managed" such

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[9] Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (London: Picador, 1993), p.38

[10] Fanon, p.151

[11] Saidiya V. Hartman, Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.22

[12] Ibid., p.8

entertainment. They enforced slaves' 'frolics' and demanded they conform to the 'naturally happy darky' stereotype whites created for slaves and found so comforting for its absolution of slavery (for what harm was slavery if blacks remained or *were made* happy by it?).[13]

The enslaved staged covert acts of resistance under these conditions, under watchful eye of the master, conforming, at least on the surface, to the master's expectations. As the work of Lawrence Levine, George Rawick and others have emphasised, the master's dominion over the enslaved was not comprehensive. Slaves managed to carve significant spheres of cultural autonomy away from the master's surveillance, developing, among other things, their own forms of music, dance and self-expression. Slaves could even win space for self-expression in the presence of the master through 'signifyin'', the practice of utilising certain linguistic and gestural modes of expression specific to blacks and indecipherable to masters. However, such expression was only possible by evading the master's surveillance[14] because, as Hartman emphasises, interactions between master and slave were governed by the master's surveillance that established and perpetuated the master's power, even in seemingly innocuous encounters like slave entertainment. In fact, such cultural forms exclusive to blacks, particularly singing and dancing, typcially aroused the master's curiosity and functioned as entertainment for the master. While winning some autonomous space, such expression did little to alter the ultimate power of the master. Hence, "the master's gaze served as a reminder that diversion could not be extricated from discipline or domination. In this regard, the owner's pleasure in looking was without question a form of surveillance and a way of policing the slave population."[15]

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[13] Ibid., p.42-7

[14] Here, we may also add that this expression was possible beyond the master's comprehension, for it was possible for slaves to signify in the master's presence so long as the master did not understand what was happening.

[15] Ibid., p.46

Such performances not only confirmed the master's power but worked to assuage the phobogenicism of the black body. Freed slave Frederick Douglass condemned these "frivolities" (as he bitterly referred to these performances) for they functioned as "safety-valves to carry off the explosive elements inseparable from the human mind when reduced to the condition of slavery.... Not the slave's happiness but *the master's safety* was the end sought" (emphasis added).[16] Douglass is referring here to the function of these frivolities to deter slave insurrection by coaxing 'happiness' from the slave, but these frivolities also functioned in the psychological service of the master. They served to calm the master's own fears – as well as the wider white society's – that slaves would seek violent retribution against him for the brutal and exploitative practice of slavery.

To emphasise this point, on the slave trade auction block and during the parade that customarily preceded it, enchained slaves were forced to march, sing, dance and display overt signs of happiness. Hartman argues that such displays served whites' interests in disavowing the pain slavery caused:

> The terms of this disavowal are something like this: No, the slave is not in pain. Pain isn't really pain for the enslaved, because of their limited sentience, tendency to forget, and easily consolable grief. Lastly, the slave is happy and, in fact, his happiness exceeds 'our' own. As a consequence of this operation, the initial revulsion and horror induced by the sight of shackled and manacled bodies gives way to reassurances of black pleasure.[17]

Under slavery, the black body was the inevitable object of scrutiny for the white gaze; black slaves were forced to perform precisely for the benefit of the white gaze. Displays like this, then, were communal reassurances for slave-owning whites, representing, as they did, slaves content to be bound, commodified and instrumentalised as an object of labour for white ownership. The black body was thus drained of its phobogenic signifying power.

The abolition of slavery radically altered the signifying status of the black body, particularly the black male body. Suddenly black men were thrust into competition with white men. As enfranchised American citizens, black men could compete for jobs, housing, political representation and social prestige. Moreover, under abolition the fear of

[16] Quoted in ibid., p.47

[17] Ibid., p.36

blacks, formerly repressed by enforced and ritualistic displays of slave 'happiness', were unleashed. Robyn Wiegman reads lynching as Southern white masculinity's response to this threat. Lynching spectacularly staged circumscription of blacks' patriarchal entitlements. Referring to the practice of castration that was intrinsic to lynchings of blacks, she writes:

> If the phallic lack characteristic of the feminine must be physically and psychologically inscribed in order to deny the black male the primary sign of power in patriarchal culture, then his threat to white masculine power arises not simply from a perceived racial difference, but from the potential for masculine sameness. In the context of white supremacy, we must understand the threat of masculine sameness as so terrifying that only the reassertion of a gendered difference can provide the necessary disavowal. It is this that lynching and castration offer in their ritualized deployment, functioning as both a refusal and a negation of the possibility of extending the privileges of patriarchy to the black man.[18]

Lynching sought to discipline the black body by demonstrating the punishment attending blacks' attempts to access phallic power. As Wiegman stresses, lynching confirmed "white masculine [retention of] hegemony over the entire field of masculine entitlements" while confining the black male "to the corporeal excess of a racial feminization."[19] Lynching emphasised to black males that although they possessed "the primary sign of power in patriarchal culture," this did not entitle them to exercise the power their phallus was supposed to signify.

However, what Wiegman's analysis misses is that more terrifying than the threat of "masculine sameness" to white supremacy was the threat of black masculine superiority. Although the black beast rapist stereotype served to license whites' policing of black male sexuality and thus enhance white phallic power to contain black males, it simultaneously served to cast black males as chaotic, primal and potent. While it justified the brutal exigency of lynching, the black beast rapist stereotype imbued the black male with untold potency through his imagined enormous sexual organ. Because the phallus functioned as "the primary sign of power in patriarchal culture" the enfranchised black phallus's

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[18] Robyn Wiegman, American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p.90

[19] Ibid., p.98

imagined superior size symbolically entitled blacks to *more* power than whites in the postbellum South.

This threat of black masculine superiority embodied in the myth of the black beast rapist betokened the obliteration of whiteness. One of the chief fears black enfranchisement aroused was of miscegenation; that, politically enfranchised, black men would seek to exercise all the privileges associated with freedom and cohabit with white women. Thomas Dixon, author of The Klansmen on which D. W. Griffith's Birth of a Nation was based, summed up this fear:

> One drop of black blood makes a Negro. It kinks the hair, flattens the nose, thickens the lips, puts out the light of intellect, and lights the fire of brutal passions. The beginning of Negro equality as a vital fact is the beginning of the end of this nation's life. There is enough negro blood here to make mulatto the whole Republic.[20]

Ironically, Dixon fears the "beginning of Negro equality" because he conceives of blackness as more "potent" than whiteness; so much so that it renders "Negro equality" impossible. Just "one drop of black blood" overwhelms whiteness, determines "Negroid" physiognomy and induces regression to primitivism. Enfranchised blacks thus became a threat to civilisation itself. This cast lynching as not only a defence of whiteness but a patriotic defence of the nation and 'enlightened' culture. Dixon may have been a Ku Klux Klan bigot but his logic followed that of the "one drop" rule, cited so famously in Plessy v Ferguson in 1896 and applied in courts late into the twentieth century, which deemed "one drop" of "colour" classified a person as "non-white."[21]

The "one drop" rule attributed a fixed and absolute fidelity to whiteness. In creating the "one drop" rule and delimiting whiteness, though, whites legislated the conditions for their own destruction. The "one drop" rule fabricated 'white' as a tremendously fragile category while attributing to the black seed enormously destructive potential. One drop of 'colour' could contaminate a sea of 'white blood' in the gene pool.

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[20] Quoted in Michael Rogin, Ronald Reagan, the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.226

[21] Phillip Brian Harper, Are We Not Men? Masculine Identity and the Problem of African-American Identity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.140

This rule, then, bestowed upon the black phallus the power to annihilate the white race through contamination of white females. The threat posed by the black phallus justified white dominion over both black men and white women. If Fanon is right that whites' imaginary constructions of blackness induce whites to be "no longer aware of the Negro, but only of a penis... [h]e *is* a penis,"[22] then the mere presence and proximity of the black male body threatened the destruction of whiteness.

Prevalent cultural stereotypes that were developed in white-dominated culture to represent blackness functioned to contain and alleviate the anxiety the black body aroused. Blackface minstrelsy proved a vital site on which to stage this containment. Whites applied burnt cork to perform grotesque parodies of 'blacks' for the amusement of all-white, and in its early years predominantly all male, audiences in what became by the middle of the nineteenth century America's first manifestation of indigenous national popular culture. Despite the conflicted desire at the heart of minstrelsy (see chapter five), blackface clearly worked to substitute the phobogenic black body with a version of blackness palatable to whites. Blackface minstrelsy's origin story maintains that T. D. "Daddy" Rice, a bohemian theatrical performer, paid crippled black man Jim Crow for the privilege of borrowing his clothes and his dance (thus symbolically inhabiting his blackness) for an evening's entertainment to a rapt white audience. Significantly, staple characters of the minstrel stage included the crippled (suggesting impotence) Crow, Sambo, an emasculated buffoon smiling his way through servitude, Uncle, a benign elderly infirm cushioned by the benevolence of slavery, and Zip Coon, a malapropising northern urban dandy comically failing to imitate the airs and graces of civilised whites. Each stereotype worked to soothe white fears by replacing actual black male bodies and black culture with emasculated versions of 'blackness' emanating from the white imaginary. As Michael Rogin writes: "The blacked-up white body unified the body politic and purified it of black physical contamination. Public sites signified their respectability by barring African Americans or

[22] Fanon, p.169

segregating them in the audience as 'darky shows' and 'coon songs' were performed on stage."[23] Simultaneously, minstrelsy invoked yet elided the black body.

Paradoxically, this substitution of white for black enabled white audiences to 'enjoy' what whites felt was authentic 'black culture'.[24] As one reviewer of P. T. Barnum's 1841 foray into promoting blackface minstrelsy stressed: "there was not an audience in America that would not have resented, in a very energetic fashion, the insult of being asked to look at the dancing of a real negro."[25] Yet blackface thrived on its claimed facsimile of "plantation melodies," "Ethiopian dances" and "coon songs." Blackface performance pivoted, then, on preserving minstrelsy's "seeming counterfeit."[26] Among props used to highlight this counterfeit were "comically" exaggerated "negro features" (like "woolly" wigs, prosthetic noses and a gap in the blackface around the mouth that was either left bare to show the whites skin underneath or smeared in red to emphasise the lips), ragged clothes, oversize shoes and parodies of black dialect. Minstrels sought, then, not to perform exactly as blacks but to perform the gap between self and blackface character; to approximate blackness without slipping over into verbatim replication, enabling white audiences to enjoy black culture while circumventing the phobogenic black body.

Significantly, blackface minstrelsy offered blacks their first opportunity to pursue commercial success through entertainment. As a mode of survival, for blacks performance

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[23] Michael Rogin, Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p.43

[24] Saidiya Hartman points to the multiple meanings of the verb 'to enjoy': "*Black's Law Dictionary* defines the term 'enjoy' as 'to have, possess, and use with satisfaction; to occupy or have the benefit of.' While enjoyment encompasses these rudimentary features, it also denotes more extensive capacities. It entails 'the exercise of a right; the promise and function of a right, privilege or incorporeal hereditament. Comfort, consolation, contentment, ease, happiness, pleasure and satisfaction. Such includes the beneficial use, interest, and purpose to which property may be put, and implies rights to profits and incomes therefrom.' At the outset, it is clear that to take delight in, to use, and to possess are inextricably linked and, moreover, that enjoyment entails everything from the use of one's possession to the value of whiteness, which can be considered an incorporeal hereditament or illusory inheritance of chattel slavery." Hartman, p.23-4. With regard to the minstrel stage, the term refers to the inextricable intersection of taking delight in, using and possessing black culture.

[25] Eric Lott, Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.112

was always already a matter of negotiating the gap between stereotypes and self-expression. Minstrelsy offered blacks the opportunity to transform this necessary negotiation into an avenue for upward mobility. Initially banned from the minstrel stage, by the late nineteenth century black blackface minstrel troupes became increasingly prevalent, mainly to entertain black communities but also, on rare occasions, to perform for whites. However, blacks had to perform in burnt cork blackface. Furthermore, they could not perform "as blacks" (especially to white audiences) but blacks had to mimic whites' imitations of whites' imaginary constructions of blackness; they had to perform dominant cultural stereotypes of blackness like Sambo, Uncle and Coon. In other words, they had to perpetuate minstresly's "seeming counterfeit" and distance themselves from their own bodies by (among other things) applying a layer of cork. In a rare foregrounding of minstrelsy's conceit, a performance in New York in 1845 of the black dancer Juba (the only black blackface performer to grace a white stage in the 1840s and widely hailed as "the world's best dancer") was advertised: "The entertainment to conclude with the Imitation Dance, by Mast. Juba, in which he will give correct Imitation Dances of all the principal Ethiopian Dancers in the United States. After which he will give an imitation of himself – and then you will see the vast difference between those that have heretofore attempted dancing and this WONDERFUL YOUNG MAN."[27] Not only does Juba's "greatness" rest, it seems, on his "correct imitations" of whites playing blacks but it shows minstrelsy's compulsion to foreground the separation of 'actual' blackness from performed blackness, for Juba can only "imitate" rather than "be" himself to a white audience.

Negotiating Dominant Cultural Stereotypes of Blackness

A Louisville reviewer, appearing to refute a widespread assumption, said of one black blackface troupe: "The success of the troupe goes to disprove the saying that a negro cannot act the nigger."[28] In fact, blacks' ability to act according to dominant stereotypes of blackness to meet the cultural expectations of the white gaze has

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[26] Ibid., p.113
[27] Ibid., p.115
[28] Rogin, Ronald Reagan, p.226

characterised racial relations. Under slavery, the slave was coerced to perform an image of blackness in both labour and 'frivolity' that pleased the master. After emancipation, Southern black males had to don a performative mask in the presence of whites to allay the immanent threat of their bodies, and had to appear subservient to whites for fear of appearing 'uppity'. Finally admitted to the postbellum stage, blacks still had to perform dominant stereotypical versions of blackness.

In this sense, blacks' performative skill emanates in large part from, in Robert Gooding-Williams's terms, the dominant culture's "supersaturation" of the black body with meaning.[29] Blacks are inundated with insidious images and constructions of blackness produced in white discourse and disseminated throughout white-dominated culture, as this passage from Fanon makes clear:

> I slip into corners and my long antennae pick up the catchphrases strewn over the surface of things - nigger underwear smells of nigger - nigger teeth are white - nigger feet are big - the nigger's barrel chest - I slip into corners, I remain silent, I strive for anonymity, for invisibility. Look, I will accept the lot, as long as no one notices me![30]

Fanon's yearning for invisibility issues from the inevitable white gaze and the prism of white racism in which his body is framed: "I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance."[31] Grace Hale argues that as public advertising became more pervasive in the late nineteenth century advertisers increasingly utilised stereotypical images of blacks culled from minstrelsy. Ubiquitous posters, packaging and periodicals depicted grinning Sambos, ridiculous dandy Zip Coons and enfeebled Uncles promoting everything from breakfast cereal to tobacco.[32] Such supersaturation of the black body

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[29] Robert Gooding-Williams, "Look, a Negro!" in Robert Gooding-Williams (ed), Reading Rodney King (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.158

[30] Fanon, p.116

[31] Ibid.

[32] Grace Elizabeth Hale, "'For Colored' and 'For White': Segregating Consumption in the South" in Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore and Bryant Simon (eds), Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p.166-8

renders it 'already known', already drenched in dominant cultural meanings that are "strewn over the surface of things."

As oppressive as this saturation of meaning is, though, it also opens a space for black subversion of dominant cultural expectations. While this saturation is so pervasive that it frequently forces blacks to interpret and experience their own identities through white frames, it provides blacks with an intimate knowledge of and familiarity with the workings of the dominant culture. It provides blacks also with an intimate knowledge of the performative self, and of performance as a means of negotiating the gap between stereotypes and self-expression. As Toni Morrison states:

> The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the [white] self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the [white] writerly conscious. It is an astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity.[33]

Through the barrage of stereotypes heaped upon them, blacks understand what whites want and expect to see in blacks. Such knowledge of these dominant cultural expectations enables phenomena such as black blackface minstrels who perform as whites performing whites' imagined versions of blackness.

Such knowledge also prises a gap between 'blackness' as blacks experience it and 'blackness' as represented in dominant cultural stereotypes. This allows blacks signifying space within which they can surreptitiously subvert white expectations. For example, Hartman surmises that although auction-block slaves sang happily for their masters, they transformed their 'happy' songs into "farewell dirges" to their families and loved ones[34]; a small victory perhaps but one that demonstrates ability to salvage dignity from the most harrowing circumstances. Similarly, enforced slave dances were occasions that allowed slaves to demonstrate athletic and artistic superiority over their masters and at least temporarily invert power relations.[35] Even black blackface minstrels could transform self-

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[33] Morrison, p.17

[34] Hartman, p.36

[35] Shane White and Graham White, Stylin': African American Expressive Culture From Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p.72-84; Ethnic Notions. Dir. Marlon Riggs. Narr. Esther Rolle. Videocassette. KOED, 1987.

denigration into an opportunity to subvert stereotypes of black infirmity through displaying verbal and physical dexterity and prowess.

However, as Michael Rogin points out, "[c]ertainly [black blackface minstrels] pushed the form as far in the direction of Afro-American self-expression as it could go, though the spread of burnt cork to cover those it represented is hardly evidence of progress toward racial equality."[36] While black blackface minstrels were able to subvert the staging of demeaning racial stereotypes, the racist exigencies of the minstrel stage prevented it from functioning as a progressive cultural form.

The variety format of the vaudeville show subsumed blackface minstrelsy in the early twentieth century but did little to alleviate the racist exigencies of the entertainment industry. The highest paid black vaudevillian Bert Williams, for example, faced numerous problems as a black performer trying to balance profitability with self-dignity. While attempting to inflect his performances with grace and humanity, the conventions of the vaudeville stage demanded that he black-up to accentuate his 'otherness'. Furthermore, while welcome to entertain whites on stage, he was unable to buy drinks from the bars at the venues he performed or socialise among whites off the stage.[37]

Similar problems beset Duke Ellington and his band during their residency at the Cotton Club during the 1920s and 1930s. Two members of Ellington's band were light-skinned, so the Cotton Club's management forced them to black-up for fear patrons would assume them to be white. Management at the Cotton Club, although keen to have a black house band, wished to avoid the impression that they encouraged integration. Despite embracing the black band, the Cotton Club's audience was exclusively white and its owners prohibited the band from mixing with whites, not allowing them to use the main entrance.[38] Furthermore, although the Cotton Club forbade interracial contact, it invited its white frequenters to experience "Jungle Music." The irony was that Duke Ellington's band played urbane, sophisticated and progressive jazz that belied this billing, so that listeners

[36] Rogin, Blackface, p.44

[37] See Ethnic Notions

[38] See Ken Burns' Jazz, episode three, "Our Language." Dir. Ken Burns. DVD. PBS Home Video, 2001.

were in fact exposed to contemporary African American urban cultural forms. While the joke may well have been at the expense of the Cotton Club's white patrons, it is crucial to question whether Ellington's band's residency can be considered progressive or even subversive given the fact that his band contained blacks blacked-up to emphasise their 'otherness', played 'jungle music' for exclusively white audiences, and used the service entrance to get into the Cotton Club.

We must consider whether a similar dynamic was at play in 1950s rock n roll; whether the dominant cultural meanings ascribed to blackness that black performers had to contend with problematises a progressive interpretation of rock n roll. In approaching Lipsitz's claim that 1950s "minority" rock n rollers were "participating in shaping American popular culture," we must consider whether and to what extent that participation was undertaken from behind performative guises donned to negotiate dominant stereotypes.

Rock n Roll

Although the rates of lynching were subsiding by the 1950s, its disciplinary work continued. Despite being specific to the South, the spectre of lynching performed the same function as geographic separation did in other parts of the country by prohibiting miscegenation. Lynching was an extreme manifestation of nationwide revulsion at interracial contact, reflected in the North by mass white exodus to the suburbs at the precise moment postwar urban migration swelled black populations of Northern cities.[39] It was this very segregation, though, that fomented the desire for cultural miscegenation evident in the popularity of rock n roll, as I will argue in the next chapter.

Poor black migrants brought traditions of folk blues to the cities. Electrified in urban centres like Chicago and Detroit to overcome the din of raucous bars and night clubs, this music was transformed into 'rhythm and blues'. The music's basic connection to the black community persisted despite technological advancement and urbanisation. Evolved from slave-era call-and-response field songs and black church dirges, melded with

[39] George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the 'White' Problem in American Studies" in American Quarterly, v.47, n.3 (September 1995), p.373-4

minstrel songs, and inflected by white folk and country influences, the blues, despite its hybridised pedigree, offered an exclusively black refuge from white racist popular culture. The blues offered a forum to counter demeaning stereotypes minstrelsy propagated, although the two forms intersected in black vaudeville, which inaugurated the careers of blues greats like Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith and Ida Cox.[40] Away from the white gaze, one major attraction of the blues was its bawdy content articulated in black vernacular. Whites' sexual repression and fear of black sexuality, coupled with black bourgeois and ecclesiastical reformers, constrained black expression in everyday life. Performers and audiences alike could share liberation from these restraints and counter demeaning stereotypes encountered in everyday life through discussion of sex (and often boasting of sexual prowess) veiled in black idiomatic references to "black snakes" and "jelly rolls." The blues was not untouched by whites - it was predominantly white-owned companies that recorded and released blues music and some whites hip to black culture even penned vaudeville blues songs for the likes of Bessie Smith - but the blues was exclusively played by, marketed to and reflective of the lives and interests of blacks.

The advent of electrified rhythm and blues changed none of this. What changed were the marketing and distribution needs and capabilities of record companies in the postwar period. When selling to black rural audiences before the war, record companies established mail-order and door-to-door sales. Postwar black migration to urban areas condensed the blues market to specific inner-city enclaves. The postwar configuration of the black population enabled the establishment of inner-city stores to sell to the public. Although nowhere near as beneficial to blacks as it was to whites, the postwar economic boom boosted blacks' expendable income, thus escalating the profitability of rhythm and blues. Sensing a potentially profitable niche market, some radio stations reserved late-night off-peak slots for rhythm and blues, and a few white-owned stations even 'went black' in the early 1950s. In turn, this introduced rhythm and blues to white suburbia. The music proved especially popular with teenagers, who sought out rhythm and blues records in inner-city black communities, which greatly enhanced the market and potential revenue for rhythm and blues and initiated the interracial contact that would spawn rock n roll.

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[40] Francis Davis, The History of the Blues (New York: Hyperion, 1995), p.80-6

Rock n roll emerged at the point white middle class youths adopted rhythm and blues as their own, a point I will explore further in a later chapter. Suffice it to say, the shift from rhythm and blues to rock n roll induced a metamorphosis in the music's complexion. Popularity among white youths precipitated intense scrutiny from the miscegenation-phobic hegemonic white adult gaze. For black performers, the advent of rock n roll held out the prospect of crossing over to mainstream success but raised concerns from which blues musicians had previously been immune.

The quandary for black male rock n roll performers seeking commercial success in the 1950s was to win acceptability among whites by in some way alleviating the phobogenicism of their bodies. In other words, to placate white anxiety these performers had to diminish the immanent danger their bodies posed in the white imaginary.

Fats Domino defused this threat through his dilution of more 'earthy' rhythm and blues numbers. He bypassed the blues' traditional bawdy content that yielded "Crawlin' King Snake," "Dead Shrimp Blues" and "Nobody in Town Can Bake A Sweet Jelly Roll Like Mine" in saccharine songs like "Let Me Walk You Home" and "My Blue Heaven." Indeed, in one of his big hits, "(I found my thrill on) Blueberry Hill," Domino's subdued intonation intimated that it was blueberries that excited him rather than any activities that might have taken place on the hill. As one critic put it, to a white suburbanite "Fats Domino was more of a threat to your refrigerator than your daughter."[41] His timid, deferential demeanour[42] and his teddy-bear physique worked to allay fears that he would make good on his boast that "I'm ready, I'm willing and I'm able/ To rock n roll all night/ Come on pretty baby/ We can rock it we can roll it/Til broad daylight" in his most potentially explosive song, "I'm Ready."

Relatively more dynamic black rock n rollers like Little Richard and Chuck Berry employed what W. T. Lhamon calls the 'Sambo strategy' to negotiate the threatening symbolism of the black body. The stereotype of the happy, grinning Sambo content in servitude and submissive to white authority was developed on the minstrel stage but it

[41] Dancing in the Street, vol.1, "Whole Lotta Shakin'." Dir. David Espar. BBC TV, 1995.

[42] Fats Domino welcomed Pat Boone's cover version of his hit "Ain't That a Shame" and performed it on stage with him.

emerged out of strategies slaves employed to negotiate the perils of slavery. Slaves staged smiling, acquiescent, sometimes gormless façades for fear of punishments attending blacks who 'did not know their place'. Slaves could enact various forms of resistance or insubordination from behind façades which whites misinterpreted as the product of ignorance or natural inferiority. On the minstrel stage, these façades were codified as a source of ridicule among whites in the figure of the Sambo. In the context of fierce nineteenth century debates about abolition, the Sambo functioned as a justification for slavery, for the Sambo's simple, happy disposition suggested that black men were not only in need of white paternalism but were grateful for it. After abolition, the Sambo conjured up nostalgic fantasies of the "good old plantation days" before emancipation had unleashed blacks' bestial instincts that were bridled under the civilising influence of slavery. The enfeebled buffoonery of the Sambo figure persevered in twentieth century representations of black men, perpetuated by characters like those portrayed in film by Stepin Fetchit and on radio and television in shows like Amos and Andy. Such representations often worked to reinforce the notions that white dominance was necessary and that blacks' 'naturally' happy dispositions were indomitable.

The 'Sambo strategy' relies on the gap between 'blackness' as represented in dominant cultural stereotypes and 'blackness' as lived experience. Blacks are inundated with these stereotypes from popular cultural representations and know what audiences expect to see in blackness. Black performers 'play the Sambo' by – on the surface, at least – conforming to stereotypical expectations of black buffoonery and happiness. But from behind this performative guise blacks can covertly subvert such expectations. The role is dualistic; Sambos "were all figures accustomed to slipping successive yokes of perception and becoming whatever their viewers needed to see in them. Sambos survived their surveillance no other way."[43] Lhamon argues that rock n rollers like Little Richard and Chuck Berry succeeded "by stamping the emerging world of pop culture with Sambo strategies sinister enough to satisfy those seeking menace, smiling enough to please

[43] W. T. Lhamon, Jr., Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), p.72

audiences hoping to escape."[44] In Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel, the Invisible Man's grandfather explains:

> Our [African American] life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country.... Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open.[45]

The 'Sambo' is essentially a performative strategy, designed to ease white anxieties yet reflect, and wage a guerrilla war in the service of, black interests. Playing the grinning 'Sambo', blacks could stage acquiescence and even 'happiness' in the face of white racism yet transform their bodies into surreptitious signifiers of black idiomatic subversion. For black performers, the danger of this strategy lay in its doubleness, in its very duality of meaning, for as it staged subversive acts in the interests of black advancement it perpetuated stereotypes designed to ease white fears of the black male body and of miscegenation. The Sambo strategy thus involves 'moments' of subversion and 'moments' of containment within the dominant racial ideology. The context of the signification as well as the signification itself, then, is crucial when evaluating the Sambo strategy.

Richard Penniman distinctly responded to the predicament of black phobogenicism. He sought to diminish his body's threat to white masculinity by adopting the name Little Richard (or small dick). Significantly, Little Richard developed his chops playing the exquisite "Princess Lavonne" in New Orleans gay and transvestite clubs, divesting his masculinity to gain a wage. In his bid for mainstream success, Little Richard cultivated the persona of a screeching, squealing queen, enabling him to deliver lines like "When she blinks an eye/Beef steaks become well-done" ("The Girl Can't Help It") without invoking black phallic threat, or at least allaying the threat that the black phallus would penetrate white *girls*. Little Richard suggested precisely this when he said: "By wearing this makeup I could work and play white clubs, and the white people didn't mind the white girls screaming over me.... They was willing to accept me, 'cause they figured I

[44] Ibid., p.85

[45] Ralph Ellison, The Invisible Man (New York: Random House, 1995), p.16

wouldn't be no harm."[46] To ensure acceptance among whites while exciting white girls, Richard reduced the potential "harm" his black male body posed by playing up his effeminacy, branding himself the "Queen of Rock n Roll,"[47] and emphasising his physical disability, hinting that the uneven length of his legs suggested sexual dysfunction. Lhamon points out "Little Richard has stressed his crippled status to many interviewers. He thus reinforces the connection between his act and its indirect origin in the dance of Jim Crow, the black and crippled hostler said to have inspired T. D. Rice's impersonation at the beginning of blackface minstrelsy."[48] Jim Crow, like the persona Little Richard projected, eased white fears of miscegenation because his limping jig signified both political and sexual impotence.

Despite his curtailment of black phallic threat, Little Richard still had to strip his songs of explicit sexual content when transferring them from black, gay and transvestite clubs into the white mainstream. For example, the original lyrics to "Tutti Frutti" were drenched with black idiomatic sexual suggestiveness characteristic of the blues: "Tutti frutti, good booty/ If it don't fit, don't force it/ You can grease it, make it easy."[49] When cutting the record, he altered them to: "Tutti frutti, on rootie/ A-wop-bop-a-loo-lop a-lop bam boom" and replaced other bawdy verses with tributes to his "girls" Sue and Daisy. Jon Savage argues that although "Richard and his producer cut lyrics to the point of nonsense" the song remained subversive because "young whites celebrated its very lack of overt meaning – which made absolute sense, not only as a cover for what was behind it, but as a surefire way to exclude adults."[50] Under the veil of nonsense, Little Richard penetrated a white suburbia that had hitherto buttressed itself against black culture. The modifications he made to his image and the content of his songs were calculated to divert

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[46] Glenn C. Altschuler, All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.60-1

[47] Charles White, The Life and Times of Little Richard: The Quasar of Rock (London: Pan Books, 1984), p.47

[48] Lhamon, p.89

[49] Jon Savage, "The Enemy Within: Sex, Rock and Identity" in Simon Frith (ed.), Facing the Music: Essays on Pop, Rock and Culture (London: Mandarin, 1990), p.140

[50] Ibid., p.141

parents' attention away from his radical transgression of racial barriers: "We were breaking through the racial barrier.... We decided that my image should be crazy and way-out so that the adults would think I was harmless."[51]

Yet the furore surrounding Little Richard's live performances was potentially explosive in the context of 1950s fears of miscegenation. Among audiences that were mixed race but predominantly white (Little Richard claimed that when he came to town, he would "get ten thousand whites and about ten blacks"[52]), female fans initiated the ritual of throwing their panties at Little Richard and his band.[53] Typically, frenzied white teenage fans rushed the stage at the end of a show and attempted to tear off Little Richard's clothes.[54] Such sexually charged rituals that radically threatened racial barriers against miscegenation were monitored closely by white authorities but still allowed because Little Richard cultivated an image that worked so hard to defuse the threat of his black body.

Thus the radicalism of Little Richard's infiltration of white suburbia and his enticement of white females must be weighed against the concessions he made to negotiate dominant cultural stereotypes of black masculinity. Lhamon argues that Little Richard was a practitioner of the Sambo strategy that thrived on the ambiguity of meaning, the evasion of definitive expression. Nonetheless, one can seek to assess the racial economy of the Sambo strategy and measure gains and losses accruing from this ambiguity of meaning. Taking "Tutti Frutti" as an example, in addition to the nonsensical youth meaning, Lhamon suggests that there is another layer of significance to the song. Although Sue and Daisy appear to be objects of Richard's heterosexual desire, Lhamon points out that "Sue" and "Daisy" were gay argot for transvestites, which opens an alternative reading of the song that transforms one line to "I got [a guy who looks like] a gal named Sue/She [he] knows just what to do." Yet in both the white youth meaning and

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[51] White, p.71

[52] Ibid., 147

[53] Ibid., p.72

[54] Ibid., p.75

the gay meaning the song's subversiveness is enabled only by the effacement of blackness in the subtraction of bawdy blues tradition from the original song. Without this subtraction, and without diminishing the threat he posed as a black male, Little Richard could never have tapped into the lucrative, white-controlled rock n roll market. In Little Richard's case, rock n roll did not offer a forum for unfettered participation in American popular culture. Rather, Little Richard could profit financially from rock n roll, and he could subversively infiltrate white suburbia, but only by negotiating historically embedded myths and stereotypes surrounding black masculinity.

The tribulations that Chuck Berry, another practitioner of the Sambo strategy, experienced also points to the problems inherent to this performative strategy. To negotiate white racism, Chuck Berry sought to divest his music of 'blackness' by pandering to white tastes and interests. He says:

> Growing up, I never heard Muddy Waters, I never heard Elmore James, Howlin Wolf. I never heard them. I heard Frank Sinatra. I heard Pat Boone... you know, Pat Boone doing Muddy Water's or whoever's numbers. And I said now why can't I do as Pat Boone does and play good music for the white people and sell as well there as I could in the neighbourhood?[55]

In his autobiography, Berry contradicts this statement; he grew up immersed in the blues of Waters, James and Wolf.[56] However, this statement, along with much of his early repertoire, indicates Berry's desire to surmount constraints placed on his race and cross over into mainstream white acceptance.

During his apprenticeship as guitarist for the Johnnie Johnson Trio, Berry's enticement of white audiences through his hillbilly playing style alienated some black patrons of blues clubs. From Berry's point of view, adopting this style was all about maximising his potential audience:

> Listening to my idol Nat Cole prompted me to sing sentimental songs with distinct diction. The songs Muddy Waters impelled me to deliver the down-home blues in the language they came from, Negro dialect. When I played hillbilly songs, I stressed my diction so that it was harder and whiter. All in all it was my intention

[55] Hail Hail Rock n Roll: Chuck Berry. Dir. Taylor Hackford. Perf. Chuck Berry, Keith Richards, Bo Diddley. Universal, 1987

[56] Chuck Berry, The Autobiography (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p.88

> to hold both the black and white clientele by voicing the different kinds of songs in their customary tongues.[57]

The dexterity of Berry's performance – his ability to slip in and out of "tongues" – is characteristic of the Sambo strategy. Yet the politics are not so clear among the mimetic layers. Berry transcends racial barriers to perform 'as white' to attract white patrons, yet mixes this with his imitation of blues or "Negro dialect" that was historically developed as a means of slipping white comprehension and attention. Berry's performance gets even more complex as he imitates Nat King Cole, a black performer who himself was "hardening" and "whitening" his diction to imitate the styles of white crooners.

Like another practitioner of the Sambo strategy, Louis Armstrong, Berry did not win universal admiration among the black community for cultivating his appeal to whites.[58] As Ike Turner grumbled, "You can't give Chuck Berry to a black. We can't listen about Chuck Berry…. Man, I mean, 'way down Louisiana' – damn Louisiana!"[59] In addition to this perceived betrayal of his racial status, Berry's insertion of a country twang into his vocals led some to promote his early singles believing he was white.

As Nat King Cole's tribulations showed, though, effacing blackness was not as easy as simply 'playing white'. Cole, eschewing signifiers of black performativity cultivated in minstrelsy, the blues and jazz, adopted the characteristics of a white crooner in order to attain success. Adorned in white bucks and cardigans, Cole looked more like Dwight Eisenhower than Chuck Berry, and his music in no way resembled rock n roll. Performing Tin Pan Alley standards in a quiet and restrained manner characteristic of white crooners, Cole won success playing predominantly to segregated white audiences. He hosted his own television show in 1956 becoming virtually the only black person on television. However, after one year NBC cancelled the show because they could not find sponsors willing to be associated with a black man.

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[57] Ibid., p.90-1

[58] Dizzy Gillespie, for example, criticized Armstrong's "plantation image." Charles Hersch, "Poisoning Their Coffee: Louis Armstrong and Civil Rights" in Polity, v.34 (Spring 2002), p.371

[59] Dancing in the Street, "Whole Lotta Shakin'"

One particular incident demonstrated Cole's inability to escape his race. A mob of white men attacked Cole during a performance before an all-white audience in Birmingham, Alabama in 1957. Cole was in the midst of performing Tin Pan Alley standard "Little Girl" when he obviously came too close to invoking the spectre of miscegenation, as one audience member shouted "Let's go get that coon." Several whites jumped on stage and wrestled Cole to the ground, while his backing orchestra reverted to "God Save the Queen," perhaps as a plea on behalf of Cole, a la Little Richard, to diminish his black masculine threat.[60] Following the attack, Alabama newspaper The Southerner followed printed pictures of Cole accompanying white fans with captions "Cole and His White Women" and "Cole and Your Daughter."[61] Cole was puzzled in wake of the attack, citing his attempted negation of black consciousness: "I have not taken part in any protests. Nor have I joined an organization fighting segregation. Why should they attack me?"[62] In Cole's logic, because he was not *for* black advancement, why should he suffer the same fate as radicalised and phallicised blacks? Yet, his attempts to conform to white performative styles ultimately fail, despite his political intentions, to spare him the re-inscription of white-constructed blackness and the violence that ensues from that inscription.

Although a confessed fan of Cole's, Berry sought not to appeal to white adult America as Cole did, but rather aimed his songs at white teenagers. Songs like "Sweet Little Sixteen" and "School Days" were Berry's attempts to lyricise the lives of the burgeoning youth culture by documenting the privileges and pitfalls inaccessible to him in his own teen years because of racial prejudice, impoverishment and imprisonment.[63] In particular, his songs emphasised rock n roll's seeming promise of escape from forces of oppression. In "School Days" rock n roll liberates teenagers from ugly teachers, annoying students and the boredom of school regimentation. Rock n roll's release of "body and

[60] Altschuler, p.38-9

[61] Ibid., p.39

[62] Ibid., p.40

[63] From ages 17 to 21 Berry was incarcerated for theft. Berry, p.49-72

soul," though, is always temporary and confined to after school hours. In "Sweet Little Sixteen" for example:

> Sweet little sixteen she got the grown up blues
> Tight dresses and lipstick she's sporting high heel shoes
> But tomorrow morning she'll have to change her train
> And be sweet sixteen and back in class again

Robert Christgau argues that songs like these foregrounded Berry's emphasis on fun "in a way that was at root ideological, celebrating the abundance of pleasures made available by a thriving consumerist economy while decrying the rigid work schedule (or school schedule, as the case may have been for Berry's songs) that kept people from being able to fully pursue those pleasures."[64] Steve Waksman adds that "the youth-based, adolescent mode of fun that dominated most of Berry's best-known songs undercut the fact that these songs were performed by a full-grown, African-American man."[65] This fact is highly significant for Berry's enactment of black masculinity. Songs like "Almost Grown" place Berry in the role of a young (almost) man, which he certainly was not by the time he began his recording career.[66] The "almost" part of this song on one hand aligns Berry with his primary audience, teenagers, yet at the same time diminishes his claim to full-grown manhood and thus his threat as a black male.[67] Berry can only pursue the innocent fun of a teenager, not a full-grown adult. Like the teen protagonists of his songs, Berry's enactment of fun was fleeting and closely monitored by white adult authorities. His fun was contingent on the veiling of his blackness. Yet the 'return' of the repressed black body

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[64] Paraphrased in Steve Waksman, Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience (London: Harvard University Press, 1999), p.156

[65] Ibid., p.156

[66] Berry was twenty-nine years old when his first hit "Maybellene" was recorded in 1955.

[67] Cynthia Fuchs makes a persuasive point about one of the bases of Michael Jackson's widespread appeal in the 1980s being a result of his cultivated image as a perpetual adolescent, thus rendering his "penis a problem." In the context of growing anxiety about urban black masculinity in the 1980s, Jackson's "Peter Pan" image, along with the morphing of his epidermis to a pallid hue, worked to alleviate the potential anxiety he may have provoked as a black male and infantilise him. Cynthia Fuchs, "Michael Jackson's Penis" in Sue Ellen Case, Phillip Brett and Susan Leigh Forster (eds), Cruising the Performative (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995)

– and the punishments and restrictions attending it in white racist society – constantly rendered problematic his songs' exaltations of rock n roll's propensity for fun.

For example, the country sound of his first hit "Maybellene" led many whites in the music industry to promote it thinking it was the work of a white artist. On one occasion, Berry was booked to perform his new hit at a dance in Knoxville. When he arrived, the promoter told him: "It's a country dance and we had no idea 'Maybellene' was recorded by a niggra man." Because the show was sold out and there was a city ordinance prohibiting blacks from performing, Berry had to sit outside the dance in his rented car while a hillbilly band performed his hit song.[68]

When Berry was allowed to perform in front of white audiences, he occasionally faced problems. One particular incident in 1959 paralleled Nat King Cole's experience and suggested the limitations of the Sambo strategy in trying to evade the violence of white racism. After being greeted by Mississippi fans who were eager to disprove common perceptions that all Mississippians were racists, Berry played a concert that was enthusiastically received. However, at the end of the concert, Berry became embroiled in an incident that unleashed the latent racial and sexual energies brewing below the surface. Berry explains:

> When I had closed the show with my major hits, several fellows and girls stumbled onto the stage begging for more selections. One of the girls threw her arms around me and hung a soul-searching kiss that I let hang a second too long. She was too beautiful not to be some-rich-body's daughter, and the smack was the turning point of the cheerful attitudes. Her close hug muted my guitar strings, bringing the dancers to notice what stopped the music. The white student backup band stopped immediately, as did the hum-bug and chatter of all the dancers.
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> Immediately I stepped down off the low stage, with guitar in one hand and my small amp in the other, and started for the door. A tall fraternity brother in a tuxedo came before me with six or seven other brothers on either side and shouted, "Chuck, did you try to date my sister?" I said, "No, of course not!" A bigger guy beside the accuser yelled, "He did, George, he's a Yankee like the rest of 'em."[69]

As the gang of angry white fraternity brothers grew – and one produced a switchblade knife while another shouted "I'm a Mississipian... and this nigger asked my sister for a

[68] Berry, p.135-6
[69] Ibid., p.197-8

date!" – Berry beat a nimble retreat. Taking cover in nearby barracks, Berry waited until a friend arrived with the police who ushered him to safety before charging him with disturbing the peace, locking in jail overnight, and fining him his entire fee for the performance.[70] Although allowed to entertain and excite hospitable white fans even in the deep South, the anxiety that Berry's black manhood inevitably provoked was always latently lingering, shadowing his performances and waiting to be transformed into sexually charged violence as it nearly was that night in Mississippi.

In exercising the Sambo strategy, Berry worked hard to downplay this threat in his songs by effacing his blackness. He actively sought to make his music "Anglopinionated," his idiosyncratic term for "white worthy" for the rock n roll market.[71] One example of this was his most popular hit "Johnny B. Goode," which was an autobiographical song steeped in black history. As Berry explains:

> One song had its birth when the tour first brought me to New Orleans, a place I'd longed to visit ever since hearing Muddy Waters's lyrics, "Going down in Louisiana, way down behind the sun." That inspiration, combined with the little bits of Dad's stories and the thrill of seeing my black name posted all over town in one of the states they brought the slaves through, turned into the song "Johnny B. Goode."[72]

The song was inspired by the blues traditions imparted by Muddy Waters and Berry's family history related to him by his father, combined with the pride at being the harbinger of racial progress in a city where his enslaved ancestors were bought and sold. Nevertheless, by the time Berry came to record his song about a "colored boy named Johnny B. Goode" who escapes poverty to become rich and famous, Berry had changed Johnny to a "country boy." Berry remarks: "My first thought was to make [Johnny's] life follow as my own had come along, but I thought it would seem biased to white fans to say 'colored boy' and changed it to 'country boy'."[73] Given the exclusively white complexion

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[70] Ibid., p.199

[71] Ibid., p.125

[72] Ibid., p.126-7

[73] Ibid., p.157

of country music and the exclusively white connotations that label carried, Berry's change was not race-neutral. Johnny, borne out of black culture and history as Berry's alter-ego, was transformed into a white boy. This change surely allowed white audiences to enjoy the song in ways they could not have if the song was about a "colored boy" and surely enhanced the record's popularity. As well as the financial pay-off from the hit record, Berry enjoyed respect from those who had discriminated against him all his life: "I imagine most black people naturally realize but I feel safe in stating that NO white person can conceive the feeling of obtaining Caucasian respect in the wake of a world of dark denial, simply because it is impossible to view the dark side when faced with brilliance. 'Johnny B. Goode' was created as all other things and brought out of a modern dark age."[74] The irony is that this "modern dark age" that Berry helped herald was forged through the effacement of "darkness" itself. In this complicated process, Berry's racial pride at "obtaining Caucasian respect" emanates from his own "dark denial" of Johnny's black heritage and parentage.

Another example of this occurs in Berry's hit "Brown Eyed Handsome Man," which George Lipsitz argues was a widely recognised euphemism for "Brown *Skinned* Handsome Man."[75] In this sense, the song was a potentially volatile expression of racial pride for Berry's 'brown eyed man' thoroughly contaminates white history, because from "way back... three thousand years/ In fact ever since the world began/ There's a whole lot of good women been shedding tears/ For a brown-eyed handsome man." He taints white civilisation's greatest art (Venus de Milo "lost both her arms in a wrestling match/ To win a brown-eyed handsome man") and the heart of American popular culture through baseball by hitting "a high fly into the stands/ Crossing third and a-heading for home/ He was a brown-eyed handsome man." Sambos become "whatever their viewers need to see in them," in Lhamon's formulation. For black viewers, the song offers a potentially radical reading of black enfranchisement, for it substitutes the history of racial segregation with one predicated on black male desirability to white women, thus simultaneously turning

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[74] Ibid., 158

miscegenation ideology on its head and indicating the black male body has already contaminated white culture. At the very least, the song lobbies for black male phallic entitlement and full access to privileges reserved for whites, like judicial favours, unfettered mobility and attainment of white women's desire. But Berry can only attempt to evade the barriers erected against his race by shifting the signifying terrain from the skin to the eyes. The apparent invocation yet ultimate displacement of the black body produces the ambiguity that enables the Sambo strategy. In other words, Berry can slip meanings of racial pride into his songs only by first diverting attention away from the phobogenic black body.

A similar displacement occurs in "Maybellene." The song's narrator pursues his object of desire Maybellene, who, he laments, has "start'd back doin' things you used to do," presumably prostituting. Maybellene rides in a plush Cadillac Coup de Ville, while Berry pushes his modest Ford to keep up the chase. As Lhamon argues, "it ends being a song about race in a race."[76] The "race" between whiteness and blackness is subsumed into a car race. As Berry commented about one of his many run-ins with white authorities, characteristic of his tendency to articulate racial matters in car metaphors: "it would be an unlikely miracle for a black to be in the lead on the road in a race that was that white."[77] As Warren Belasco argues, in "Maybellene" Berry's choice of a stoic Ford paints him as the folk hero David against the Goliath in the Cadillac.[78] The wealthy (white) driver of the Cadillac has bought Maybellene from under Berry's nose, but, despite his disadvantages, Berry will tenaciously pursue his desire to possess Maybellene. Intonated in country twang, which many listeners mistook for white, the song perhaps suggests Maybellene is a white country girl – or maybe in "start'd back doin' the things you used to do" she is back to passing for white – in which case by pursuing Maybellene Berry pursues the exclusive

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[75] George Lipsitz, "'Against the Wind': The Class Composition of Rock and Roll Music" in Knowledge and Society, vol.5 (1984), p.287

[76] Lhamon, p.78

[77] Berry, p.207

[78] Warren Belasco, "Motivatin' with Chuck Berry and Frederick Jackson Turner" in David Lewis and Laurence Goldstein (eds), The Automobile and American Culture (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1983), p.267-9

phallic entitlement of white men to possess women of all races. Characteristic of the Sambo strategy's ambiguity, black listeners were more likely to see Berry's Ford as a metaphor for his blackness than white listeners.[79] Berry thus pursued black phallic entitlement ingeniously but indirectly, narrating a car "race about race" with a country twang and a grinning Sambo visage designed for white consumption. The Sambo strategy's ambiguity, while enabling surreptitious signs of subversion at the level of intention, produces an overall ambivalent effect because the pervasive dominant cultural stereotypes that have functioned historically to curb black phallic entitlement and reinforce white dominance are here being re-staged.

Berry's stage act was also riven with such ambiguity. Describing his characteristic 'duck walk', Steve Waksman writes:

> [Berry is] bending his knees to bring his body towards the ground and pacing back and forth across the stage, his head butting forwards and back while his guitar point[s] out from his body in a position that was phallic but arguably more playful than aggressive.[80]

This act, of a black man wielding his guitar like a phallus while thrusting himself across the stage in front of excited white and integrated audiences, was a radical transgression of racial behavioural codes developed to assuage fear of phallicised blacks. It was surely a 'moment' of subversion each time Berry scooted across the stage brandishing his guitar in front of cheering white audiences. Considering the fear the phallicised black body aroused in whites, one must question whether such a gesture could possibly be "more playful than aggressive." The fact that this transgression could be read as harmless "play" attests to the lengths to which Berry went to veil his blackness, and thus his threat, to white audiences.

A labelmate of Berry's at Chess Records, Bo Diddley, was not allowed such latitude in his performances. Diddley did not achieve the consistent cross-over success Berry and Little Richard enjoyed among the predominantly white rock n roll audience, at

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[79] As LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) argues, the Ford motor company commonly features in blues songs and is significant in the black community for being one of the first companies to hire black people. The Model-T Ford – also known as the "poor man's car" – was also one of the few cars that black workers could afford to own. LeRoi Jones, Blues People: Negro Music in White America (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1963), p.97

[80] Waksman, p.152

least partly because Diddley did not employ the Sambo strategy to the same extent. His attire – colourful suits, small bow-ties and large-rimmed spectacles – along with his peculiarly shaped home-made guitars gave him the appeal of a novelty act that invoked at least to an extent to the clownish minstrel show Sambo. However, the content of his songs belied the novelty of his appearance. In contrast to Little Richard, Diddley's trademark songs "Bo Diddley," "Who Do You Love?" and "I'm A Man" were bold boasts of his masculine prowess. "I'm A Man," in particular, not only articulated a trenchant rejection of the racial epithet 'boy' but bragged also of Bo's sexual appetite: "All you pretty women/ Stand in line/ I'll make love to ya/ In an hour's time/ I'm a man!" In contrast with the adolescent masculinity expressed in Chuck Berry's "Almost Grown" and the compromised masculinity inferred by Little Richard, Diddley boasted of being all man. By asserting black masculine potency that was underscored by the driving beat of his music, Diddley invoked the threat of black masculine superiority and, by implication, betokened the obliteration of whiteness according to the logic of the one drop rule. His clownish appearance could not allay this threat. His songs' confrontational content outweighed his otherwise playful image. Hence, the contract drawn up for Bo Diddley's first television appearance forbade him from dancing in front of the predominantly white audience because of the phallic threat his body conveyed. Because he wiggled when he started playing, he was docked his full fee.[81] While Chuck Berry could brandish his guitar during his "phallic" duck walk to the delight of white fans because he downplayed his racial and masculine status in his songs, Diddley was contractually obligated to be cemented to the spot so as to curb the phallic potency about which his songs boasted.

Although Berry's use of the Sambo strategy allowed him to enact his phallic duck walk while performing on stage, off-stage his pursuit of "phallic entitlements" was curtailed by the appropriately named "the Mann Act." The Mann Act, which also worked to end the career of the first African American heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson whose penchant was displaying his fondness for white women, policed phallic entitlement. Its ostensible purpose was to prevent "white slavery," the trafficking of white prostitutes, but its targets were most commonly black men involved with white women. In

[81] Martin and Segrave, p.42

what seems an instance of outright revenge against rock n roll, Berry was charged and convicted with transporting a minor across state lines for "commercial purposes" in 1959. Although the minor in question was Mexican (non-white), Berry had had a dalliance with a French (white) girl the year before (authorities apprehended Berry travelling with this white girl, but due to her recalcitrance could not apply the Mann Act). Berry was, therefore, in the racist establishment's firing line and was incarcerated for 18 months at the height of his career.[82]

Berry's troubles indicate some of the limitations of the Sambo strategy. Strategies attempting to defuse the immanent threat of the black male body, while allowing some performative latitude, were not sufficient to evade the surveying gaze of white authorities. Although such strategies enabled entry into the lucrative rock n roll market, playing the Sambo could not fully allay the potential danger of a black man exciting white teenaged audiences with (albeit often obliquely) sexualised music.

Indeed, the white establishment closely monitored precisely such potential danger. When fourteen year old falsetto doo-wopper Frankie Lymon wandered into the crowd and danced briefly with a white girl during his group's performance on Alan Freed's Rock 'n' Roll Dance Party, the television show was immediately pulled off the air and its season was cancelled.[83] Perhaps in response to this, Dick Clark's dance show American Bandstand initially permitted only white dancers, but by its third season one black *couple* (provided they only danced with each other) were admitted as a token of racial equality.[84] Additionally, most rock n roll shows were either segregated completely or divided by ropes into separate racial domains, and dancing was commonly forbidden.[85] In these highly visible instances, rock n roll threatened to smudge the colour line by drawing black and

[82] Berry, p.195-209

[83] Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo, Rock 'n' Roll Is Here to Pay: The History and Politics of the Music Industry (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1977), p.46-7

[84] Altschuler, p.40

[85] Martin and Segrave, passim

white youths close together. On the other hand, it provided the occasion for segregating blacks from whites, thus alleviating fears of racial mixing and miscegenation.

The music industry mobilised various strategies to exploit black rock n rollers. Consequently, Bo Diddley charged that R & B stood not for "rhythm and blues" but "Ripoffs and Bullshit."[86] Chuck Berry was forced to share songwriting credits and ensuing royalties from his first hit "Maybellene" with two white men he had never met before, Alan Freed, who agreed to promote the record on his radio show, and Russ Fratto, who owned the shop that printed the song's music.[87] Moreover, most black artists were either paid a flat fee, sometimes as little as $5 and a bottle of whiskey, for their performance and all songwriting credits,[88] or tied to inequitable contracts that, Little Richard explains, amounted to them earning one penny per two records sold.[89]

White "covers" of black tunes further diminished black artists' incomes. To the white-owned record industry, "covering," the practice of established white stars performing a tune black artists had first written and performed, made sense because a black rhythm and blues or rock n roll tune could, because of restrictions placed on black material, gain greater coverage and distribution via a white version. Since white-owned publishing companies had already purchased the song from blacks, they stood to gain more revenue from the cover record. The original thus served merely as a litmus test of the song's potential popularity in the wider market. Frequently, the cover version, often an insipid, 'whitened' copy, outsold the original, much to the chagrin of black artists.[90]

Although by 1956 covering was in decline due to the exposure black rock n rollers like Fats Domino, Little Richard and Chuck Berry were gaining, the practice still persisted in attempting to overshadow the black original. That is, even when black rock n rollers had seemed to surmount restrictive racial stereotypes, had penetrated mainstream culture

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[86] Altschuler, p.15

[87] Berry, p.110

[88] Chapple and Garofalo, p.29

[89] Hail Hail Rock n Roll: Chuck Berry

[90] Chapple and Garofalo, p.34-6

and had proven their profitability, companies still preferred to promote insipid white cover versions. The career of one particularly vapid white performer, Pat Boone, was founded on cover versions. Despite betraying no knowledge of or affinity to black culture (of covering Little Richard, he said: "I was reluctant to do songs like 'Tutti Frutti', which, frankly, don't make a lot of sense"[91]), Boone performed diluted versions of songs like Fats Domino's "Ain't That a Shame" (which Boone lobbied to have changed to "Isn't That a Shame" for fear of offending his English professor) and outsold the originals because of his superior access to promotion and distribution. Little Richard adopted the be-bop tactic of performing his next single "Long Tall Sally" too fast and too obliquely for Boone's white-bred phrasing to emulate, yet Boone's version still succeeded.[92] Despite Little Richard's attempted minimisation of his body's phobogenic threat, his blackness was nevertheless an insurmountable obstacle. From the music industry's point of view, covering was the perfect solution to the dilemma of catering rock n roll to a market at once thirsting for black culture yet fearful of blackness, for it enabled white audiences to enjoy (albeit diluted) black songs and culture while circumventing the black body.

Although rock n roll fomented an unprecedented degree of cultural interchange between young blacks and whites, historically embedded racial myths and stereotypes, operative in the context of fervent racism in the postwar period, circumscribed the permissible limits of black male performance. In addition to this, from inequitable contracts to record companies' encouragement of cover versions of black songs by odiously bland white performers like Pat Boone, the music industry worked to inhibit black participation. But unlike other prominent white rock n rollers of the 1950s, Boone's ignorance of and disinterest in black culture restricted the extent of his theft from blacks. Boone harboured no desires to 'become black' or cut across the colour line.

Although Boone's covers enabled access to exceedingly diluted forms of black culture through a white body, at least he did not evoke racial romanticism or the burnt cork of blackface minstrelsy. As I will argue in the next chapter, whites like Elvis Presley,

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[91] Rock and Roll: The Early Days. Dir. Pamela Page. Archive Films, 1984

[92] The Little Richard Story. Dir. Robert Townsend. Perf. Leon, Jenifer Lewis, Mel Jackson. Twentieth Century-Fox Television, 2000

Jack Kerouac and Norman Mailer, who professed an intense admiration for black culture and even a desire to embody blackness, sought a more authentic engagement with black culture than the likes of Boone. But their race-crossing desires tended to romanticise the culture of the racial other, reproducing racial stereotypes that ultimately worked in the interests of segregation.

Chapter 5

Hound Dogs and Hillbilly Cats: The Racial Problematics of Rock n Roll

"Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfilment of destiny." – Toni Morrison[1]

"The animalistic vulgarity of the rock n roll bop music is obviously a means by which the white man – and his children – can be driven to the level with the Negro." – Asa Carter, chairman of the Alabama Citizens' Council[2]

"Oh, we're Negroes, too. At least we gets to feeling that we are." – Buddy Holly to his mother when asked about touring with black performers[3]

One of most debated accounts of the birth of rock n roll invokes the recording of Elvis Presley's first hit. Eighteen year old Presley first entered the Memphis Recording Service building in summer 1953 to record two ballads, "My Happiness" and "That's When Your Heartaches Begin." Presley nervously mentioned his interest in pursuing singing to the Service's secretary Marion Keisker[4] and left with his songs on acetate, which he gifted to his mother.[5] Presley returned in January 1954 to record two more sides,

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[1] Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (London: Picador, 1993), p.52

[2] Dancing in the Street. Episode One: "Whole Lotta Shakin'." Dir. David Espar. BBC, 1995

[3] George Lipsitz, "'Against the Wind': The Class Composition of Rock and Roll Music" in Knowledge and Society, vol.5 (1984), p.276

[4] Elvis reportedly said to Keisker, "if you know anyone that needs a singer…" When asked what style he sang, Presley said: "I don't sing like nobody." Peter Guralnick, Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley (London: Abacus, 1995), p.63

[5] The Memphis Recording Service was subsidised by the city to offer residents the opportunity, for a fee, to make their own records onto acetate, a straight-to-record recording of poorer quality than standard vinyl releases. Elvis paid $3.98 plus tax for each recording session. Guralnick, p.63

without any indication that his singing ambitions would amount to any more than self-financed gifts for his mother. However, in May 1954, the Memphis Recording Service's producer Sam Phillips received a demo of a song that he felt had potential entitled "Without You" from a black Nashville singer;[6] when he was unable to contact the demo's singer, Keisker, recalling Phillips' constant refrain "if only I could find me a white boy with that Negro feel I could make a million bucks,"[7] suggested (momentarily forgetting Presley's name) "the kid with the sideburns."[8] Although Presley's subsequent attempts to render the song disappointed Phillips, he liked Presley's voice. Phillips arranged for the young truck driver Presley to rehearse with dry-cleaning country guitarist Scotty Moore and bassist Bill Black, who worked at the Firestone tyre factory, to prepare a demo at the Service building which now bore the name of Phillips' company, Sun Studios.

After the band's abortive attempts to cover Bing Crosby's pop hit "Harbour Lights" and country ballad "I Love You Because," an exasperated Phillips called a break. Phillips fiddled with tape in the control room and Moore and Black sucked on sodas. Presley stayed in the recording booth and "this song popped into my mind that I had heard years ago, and I started kidding around." The song was "That's Alright, Mama," a blues song Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup had recorded in 1946, which Presley performed while "jumping around and acting the fool," as Moore recalled. Moore reportedly exclaimed "*Damn*, nigger!" and, according to Moore, "then Bill picked up his bass, and he started acting the fool, too, and I started playing with them." Excited by what he heard, Phillips asked what they were doing to that blues song; "we don't know" was the reply. Phillips implored them to "try to find a place to start and do it again."[9] Later, Phillips

[6] This fact is mentioned on Elvis: The Sun Years, LP. Sun, 1977, an audio documentary on Elvis' early career, and backed up in Guralnick, p.84-5

[7] Phillips repeats this on Sun Days with Elvis. Dir. Bernard Roughton. DVD. Payless Entertainment, 1996.

[8] The album Elvis: The Sun Years alleges she said "the kid with sideburns" while Guralnick quotes Keisker as suggesting Presley by name (p.85).

[9] This account of the recording session comes from Guralnick, p.94-5. While Guralnick's account of Presley's career is commonly the most exhaustive, he doesn't mention Moore's "*Damn*, nigger!" comment, but it is widely repeated as fact in, for instance, Michael Bertrand, Race, Rock and Elvis (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p.107

recalled that Presley "was just a raw kid with no training, but he had an interesting sound. He was a white boy, but he was singing like a Negro."[10]

Phillips convinced friend and local disc jockey celebrity Dewey Phillips to play the acetate on his radio show to gauge reaction. Listeners enthusiastically called the show, repeatedly requesting the song. Phillips played it around ten times that first night, and invited Presley down to the station to appear live on his show that night. Presley's parents pulled him out of the local movie theatre (Presley was too nervous to listen to the radio show that night because he knew his song would debut) and Phillips, instructing Presley to "not cuss" while he was on air, interviewed him. To allay the queries of some listeners who thought Presley was black, Phillips asked Presley which high school he had attended, to which Presley replied "Humes High" – an all-white school.[11]

On the back of the record's local success, Presley appeared throughout the South, performing the song at prestigious events like the Louisiana Hayride and the Grand Ole Opry, and then television, propelling the record into both the rhythm and blues and country charts. Presley's local success on the back of this rhythm and blues cover attracted major label RCA's attention; RCA bought out his Sun contract for $30,000 and made him the biggest star in the music industry within a year. The "Negro feel" of "That's Alright Mama" became the template for Presley's subsequent recordings, and became the yardstick by which critics measured the quality of all future Presley, and to an extent all rock n roll, recordings.

The ambiguities that riddle the "That's Alright Mama" story make it highly pliable; it is able to be shaped to fit many divergent – even ideologically opposed – arguments. For instance, one could read Scotty Moore's exclamation "*Damn*, nigger!" at Presley's performance of a black rhythm and blues song as evidence of the musician's racism. In other words, perhaps Moore is calling Presley a "nigger," or deriding him for playing a black song. Southern whites often responded with such derision to whites who showed admiration for black culture; Sam Phillips certainly suffered many derogatory comments for recording black bluesmen at his studio in the early 1950s. On the other hand, Moore's enthusiastic backing of Presley's version of Crudup's song suggests that

[10] Bertrand, p.103

[11] Guralnick, p.100-2

he was familiar with black culture, too. Perhaps his exclamation is a case of Moore ventriloquising "as black" – putting on a black accent in response to Presley's black song, using the term "nigger" to identify Presley as a "brother for the time being," as Eric Lott would put it.[12] Indeed, perhaps both Moore and Presley inhabited black personae to break the tension and frustration of a failing recording session and to invoke the freedom, playfulness and "*gaité de coeur*" which were, as I will explain later, common white associations of blackness.[13]

Two types of arguments tend to dominate discussions of rock n roll's racial significance, and each cites parts of the "That's Alright, Mama," story to support its position. At one pole is the argument that Presley, and by extension all white rock n rollers, stole rhythm and blues music, an exclusively black form of music, and repackaged and marketed it as a white cultural form. As such, rock n roll was part of a recurring process in the history of American popular culture in which an innovative cultural form originating in the black community was stolen by white culture and reinvented as the music of the white mainstream. Critic Joe Wood reflects this assessment of Elvis:

> He mastered [black music], giving white folk 'license' to rock, by making a basically black form of popular music 'accessible' to many whites.... Way past those first few records when his music was any good, Elvis kept generating big bucks and attention – already an icon of chauvinistic white culture consumption.... Which makes him the Greatest in a long line of White American Consumers. Dust off those Paul Whiteman (the King of Jazz) records, or listen to Benny Goodman's (the King of Swing) watered swing, and you'll catch a drift of the tradition of the drift.[14]

Wood's argument seems compelling if one reads Presley's 'accidental' discovery of rock n roll as an indication of his contempt for the black original; if one assumes that Presley bonded with his band by mocking black culture. Indeed, like Whiteman and Goodman, Presley and white rock n rollers reaped enormous profits while the more talented black

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[12] Eric Lott, "White Like Me: Racial Cross-Dressing and the Construction of American Whiteness," in Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease (eds.), Culture of United States Imperialism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p.477

[13] Ibid., p.479

[14] Gilbert Rodman, Elvis After Elvis: The Posthumous Career of a Living Legend (London: Routledge, 1996), p.47

originators, like Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup, went unacknowledged, unappreciated and uncompensated. Additionally, this was Sam Phillips's intention from the start; his desire for a "white boy with that Negro feel" indicated his willingness to abandon black rhythm and blues performers, whose success had enabled Phillips to launch his own label, and take their music to the lucrative white market. It was, after all, Presley's whiteness that reassured Dewey Phillips's listeners who were uneasy about the racial indeterminacy of Presley's style. Because he was white, bastions of white redneck racism like the Louisiana Hayride and the Grand Ole Opry allowed Presley on their stages to perform rhythm and blues songs, and television, which usually did not transmit black performers especially during prime time, welcomed Presley. Rhythm and blues duo Shirley and Lee echo the sentiments of many rhythm and blues artists who feel cheated by the racist music industry when they comment about Elvis: "It doesn't require much ability to steal a style, grab a guitar and get some shrewd managers who know how to sell you."[15]

The other type of argument sees the growth of rock n roll as a radical refiguring of race relations in postwar America. In particular, to advocates of this argument, the rise of rock n roll demonstrates white youth culture's growing awareness of, sensitivity to, and sympathy with the plight of black Americans suffering racist oppression. For these critics, rock n roll was a progressive force for social change, crusading against and unsettling segregationists who wished to partition America along racial lines. That Presley, a white southern autodidact of black culture, organically discovered rock n roll from his impromptu performance of "That's Alright Mama," one of many black blues songs he knew, demonstrates a love of black culture not normally associated with white working class southerners. That two southern working class musicians steeped in country traditions like Moore and Black would follow Presley's venture so seamlessly indicates that love was becoming more widespread among young southern whites; that there was a deeply felt desire among these young whites to cross some of the barriers of Jim Crow segregation. Moreover, that Sam Phillips, the progressive white producer of many black artists like Howlin' Wolf, Ike Turner and the Prisonaires, would recognise the song immediately and encourage the band to cross racial boundaries, suggests Phillips saw commercial potential in this racially-mixed style; that he perceived a market among

[15] Bertrand, p.219

similarly-minded youngsters for a white band playing black music. Indeed, the song's success bears out Phillips's instincts; many Americans, especially white youths, gleefully supported this subversively integrated music. As critic Dave Marsh says:

> There was nothing shameful about appropriating the work of black people, anyway. If Elvis had simply stolen rhythm and blues from Negro culture, as pop music ignoramuses have for years maintained, there would have been *no reason* for Southern outrage over his new music.... But Elvis did something more daring and dangerous. He not only 'sounded like a nigger', he was actively and clearly involved in race-mixing. The crime of Elvis' rock n roll was that he proved that black and white tendencies could coexist and that the product of their coexistence was not just palatable but thrilling.[16]

Both of these types of arguments make compelling points regarding the racial significance of rock n roll, but neither, taken in isolation, is wholly convincing. Nelson George, one of the most convincing proponents of the former type of argument, details the harm done to rhythm and blues as the music of the postwar black community during the ascendance of rock n roll. He argues that rock n roll constituted a destructive theft of black music because the transformation from rhythm and blues to rock n roll severed the music's links to its original audience. The intervention of the white consumer warped the music; where rhythm and blues once reflected the ideals and aspirations of the postwar inner-city black community, performers who sought the rock n roll audience sang songs about teenagers, cars, after-school jobs and puppy love: "Rock & roll was young music; R&B managed to be young and old, filled both with references to the past and with fresh interpretations, all at the same time."[17] Yet, George's argument that the renaming of the music as rock n roll "dulled the racial identification and made the young white consumers of Cold War America feel more comfortable"[18] understates the elements of thrill and danger that drew youths to the music. Although the term 'rock n roll' did mask the music's black origins, the music, rather than offering comfort, threatened Cold War America in many ways, and this was part of the attraction for young white consumers.

Despite some differences in their arguments, two of the most persuasive advocates of rock n roll as a progressive force for changing the racial character of

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[16] Rodman, p.52

[17] Nelson George, The Death of Rhythm and Blues (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1988), p.68-9

[18] Ibid., p.67

postwar America are George Lipsitz and Michael Bertrand. As I indicated in the last chapter, Lipsitz argues that 1950s rock n roll offered a means for racial minorities to participate in and shape American popular culture in unprecedented ways, and that the music's "popularity reflected changes in race relations as white teenagers accepted as their own a music that originated among racial minorities."[19] Bertrand makes a similar, although more tempered, argument. Focusing on the South's role in the invention of rock n roll, Bertrand alleges that the group he labels "other Southerners" – white Southerners ambivalent toward race who were often overshadowed by stereotypical portrayals of the white Southern racist – both eagerly supported rock n roll and tacitly supported changing attitudes towards race. He writes:

> Through their personal choices and endeavours… [these other Southerners] intensified the civil rights discussion, shifting the issue of race from the public to the private sphere, from the school to the home. Every time they tuned into a rhythm and blues program or attended a rock 'n' roll concert, they initiated a dialogue about black equality. More often than not, the exchange forged new and divergent trails into the frontier of southern racial etiquette.[20]

Furthermore, like Lipsitz, Bertrand sees white youths and blacks sharing music that jointly expressed their ideals and aspirations: "it is possible to see how rhythm and blues and rock 'n' roll became a shared vehicle of expression for various groups the mainstream had ignored, maligned and rejected."[21] The major problem with this is implicit in Bertrand's terms; rhythm and blues and rock n roll were not the same cultural form, and they expressed divergent ideals, values and aspirations, as George points out and I will elaborate shortly. Although Lipsitz and Bertrand persuasively posit that rock n roll was a rebellious cultural form for 1950s youth culture, they tend to overlook or minimise the problems inherent to white youth's appropriation of black culture to express their rebellion. Also, they assume young whites' appropriation of rhythm and blues was based on racial awareness and sympathy, without considering the extent that the inherent

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[19] George Lipsitz, "Land of a Thousand Dances: Youth, Minorities, and the Rise of Rock and Roll" in Lary May (ed.), Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p.268

[20] Bertrand, p.158

[21] Ibid., p.195

racism of the music industry, coupled with the racial romanticism with which whites often approached black culture, problematised the music's 'integrationist' potential.

In this chapter, I will attempt to surmount the inadequacies of both types of argument by situating the rise of rock n roll in the context of the nascent 1950s youth culture. By doing this, I portray rock n roll both as a subversive critique of Cold War America and as a racially problematic cultural form. Building on the previous chapter that detailed the impediments circumscribing black male rock n rollers' participation in American popular culture, I will outline the effects of white youth's appropriation of rhythm and blues. I will argue that an initial vanguard of young white consumers of rhythm and blues in the early 1950s alerted a coterie of entrepreneurs, mostly white, to the music's potential popularity among the lucrative youth market. Renamed rock n roll, from the mid-1950s to the end of the decade, the music increasingly reflected 1950s white youth culture and its rebellious imperatives. By drawing young blacks and whites together, rock n roll challenged the 'consensus' society of containment culture and often, as Lipsitz and Bertrand argue, promised to be a force for integration. However, the pervasive racial ideologies of Cold War America permeated even rebellious cultural forms, from both popular culture and high culture, that were openly enamoured with black culture. These ideologies ultimately worked to vitiate the subversive impulses of rock n roll both as an expression of the rebellious imperatives of youth culture and as a "utopian" critique of a racist society.

Some critics, including Lipsitz, argue that rock n roll blended country music with rhythm and blues, producing a hybridised musical form. Certainly, white rock n rollers like Buddy Holly, Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis and Presley were raised in communities where country music was ubiquitous, and their affinity with country music inflected their songs. However, as Bertrand argues, these performers radically departed from the traditional racial politics of country music. Country musicians were traditionally deterred, especially by their predominantly Southern white audience, from acknowledging the cultural cross-pollination of their music with (black) blues, despite the obvious connections between country and blues. White rock n rollers, however, through "style of performance, dress, speech, and manner of presentation," were explicitly "attempting to

connect to their [rhythm and blues] counterparts."[22] While rock n rollers blended musical elements of both country music and rhythm and blues, in terms of performance styles, dress, dance and rhythm, white rock n rollers drew overwhelmingly more on rhythm and blues.

Many aspects of the transformation from rhythm and blues to rock n roll problematise interpretations of rock n roll as a force for integration. Firstly, in its transformation into music that was primarily for and about white youth, white performers enjoyed tremendous advantages over black performers in their pursuit of success. Because of the various obstacles to black artists' participation in 1950s popular culture, as I outlined in the previous chapter, many producers and promoters preferred investing in white performers. As Bo Diddley complained, "When record producers found out they had a white boy who could wiggle and stuff, they shoved the black artists in the corner."[23]

Secondly, as Nelson George argues, the transformation of rhythm and blues into rock n roll did in fact divorce the music from its original function in the black community. Paradoxically, the music's black origins were masked under the nomenclature of 'rock n roll', and were important primarily in buttressing youth's sense of difference from adult culture. That is, blackness was often desired and romanticised for its exotic otherness to white hegemonic adult culture; indeed, adult culture's violent revulsion to rock n roll undoubtedly increased the music's appeal among teenagers. This romanticisation could potentially engender sympathy for the plight of black people and foster integrationist politics. But it could also potentially perpetuate racist stereotypes and fuel fantasies of possession and inhabitation of the racial other that were ultimately antithetical to integrationist politics. The "American Africanism" (in Toni Morrison's words[24]) conjured by rebellious whites of the 1950s suggested a dangerous, thrilling alternative to the bland adult world they were expected to inherit. The cultural miscegenation implied by young whites' celebration of this exotic 'other' signalled white youth's rejection of

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[22] Ibid., p.97-9

[23] Ibid., p.192

[24] Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (London: Picador, 1993), passim

containment's 'consensus' society. But that threatening figure of the racial other was merely a cipher that reflected more about its white conjurers than the 'real' black person who was its supposed referent. As a force for identity politics, rock n roll in the 1950s was primarily a cultural space for the expression of an autonomous white youth cultural identity that was at best ambivalent about racial politics.

Rhythm and Blues and the Postwar Black Community

Rhythm and blues emerged as the most popular and relevant music to working class blacks in the postwar period. As jazz became more arcane and less danceable under the influence of the be-bop innovators, rhythm and blues, which blended urban swing with country blues, supplanted it as the music of choice for black weekend revellers. But rhythm and blues was more than just good dance music. Its popularity in large part emanated from its relevance to the realities of black life in the postwar period. Rhythm and blues confronted the paradoxes and complexities associated with the massive migration of rural blacks to urban areas in the 1940s (approximately 1.2 million black migrated from the rural South to the urban North in the 1940s[25]). In particular, the music provided a bridge between the old southern cultural traditions left behind and the new harsh realities of urban living that imperilled those traditions. The bitter irony endemic to relocation – anticipating a better life away from the Jim Crow South and the exploitative economic system of sharecropping yet nonetheless encountering forms of segregation and prejudice in the supposedly 'progressive' North – energised the music and made its heavy beat all the more urgent and defiant.

Rhythm and blues pioneer Louis Jordan emblemised the new music's blend of up-tempo urban rhythms with southern traditions. Playing saxophone in swing drummer Chick Webb's band throughout the 1930s, Jordan started his own band, the Tympany Five, in 1938 after parting with Webb acrimoniously.[26] Dispensing with the large big-

[25] Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo, Rock 'n' Roll Is Here to Pay: The History and Politics of the Music Industry (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1977), p.28

[26] The following discussion of Louis Jordan is taken from various references. In regards to Jordan's departure from Webb's band, the liner notes to Jordan's compilation Five Guys Named Moe refers to acrimony between Webb and Jordan while George cites Webb's death as the motivation for Jordan's solo venture. Webb died in 1939. Five Guys Named Moe (Cassette: Prism Leisure, 1998, liner notes by Tony Watts); George, p.19-20.

band format, Jordan's streamlined horn section and intensified rhythm established the standard arrangement for rhythm and blues bands of the 1940s. Jordan, signed to major label Decca, worked closely with white staff producer Milt Gabler, with whom he co-wrote many songs, including one of his best-known, "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie." Together, they tailored songs that were tied to the traditions of a black urban community that was one generation or less separated from the South. They combined black vernacular common to country blues with black verbal games like playing the dozens and contemporary hipster jargon.

Jordan successfully combined highly danceable up-tempo rhythms with songs that reflected the black community's ambiguity toward its past, that yearned nostalgically for southern traditions but harboured desire to 'hip' the country 'hickster' newcomer to the ways of the big city. Jordan's "Beans and Cornbread," "Ain't Nobody Here But Us Chickens" and "Saturday Night Fish Fry" all sported titles connoting Southern traditions but contained sly commentaries on the urban present. For example, "Ain't Nobody Here But Us Chickens," which concerns a farmer attending to a disturbance in his chicken coop only to be reassured by the intruder that "there ain't nobody here but us chickens," is a song about both black traditions and the urban present. As Lipsitz argues, the song's lyrics belong to the traditions of "trickster-heroes" whose lineage in the black community stretches back beyond slavery to African folk tales, while the music unmistakably emanates from Jordan's urban rhythms developed from his time with Chick Webb's swing band.[27] Nelson George argues that the song, while on the surface set on a rural farm, is instead a veiled "metaphor for a black house party that the farmer – perhaps the landlord, maybe the police – wants to quiet."[28] "Saturday Night Fish Fry" similarly combines a contemporary urban setting with southern imagery, as its protagonist cruises between black urban night clubs in New Orleans and suddenly happens upon a southern fish fry party, where the country party tradition brings together "chicks wearing expensive frocks" with the "others wearing bobby sox." Jordan's marriage of urban music with songs that reinvigorated and reinvented southern traditions in ways that

[27] George Lipsitz, Class and Culture in Cold War America: "A Rainbow at Midnight" (Praeger, 1981), p.195-6, 199

[28] George, p.19

satisfied the ambivalent black urban market influenced the major figures who followed Jordan into rhythm and blues music, like Ray Charles, Chuck Berry, Little Richard and James Brown, all of whom cite Jordan as their main source of inspiration.[29]

The new style of music Louis Jordan helped pioneer caused a reappraisal of the way the music industry categorised markets. The three main markets for music during the 1940s were Pop, Country and Western, and Race music, and each had separate popularity charts. By 1949, the designation of "Race music," which was previously an umbrella term encompassing all types of music made exclusively for the black audience whether it was black jazz, country blues, gospel or spirituals, was changed to "rhythm and blues" or "R&B" by the industry's official chart magazine Billboard.[30] This was not an innovative decision on Billboard's part; rather, this change reflected language that the rest of the industry was already using.[31] This change indicated rhythm and blues' primacy as the dominant musical form of the African American market by 1949, as these categories referred more to the way the music was marketed than what it sounded like, as Chapple and Garofalo explain:

> Pop music was music marketed by the major companies through their main distribution systems, which were national. R&b music was marketed by independent labels with independent regional distributors. Where major labels had r&b subsidiaries, the music was segregated in their catalogue listings and contracted out to independent distributors. R&b songs were first distributed to exclusively black retail outlets and radio stations…. The black audience was separated as a secondary market, with different and inferior promotion budgets.[32]

Radio was vital to disseminating rhythm and blues both within and between these regional r&b markets. Various technological innovations following World War Two helped spread rhythm and blues on the radio. Innovations in transistor technology allowed radios to be manufactured and sold much more cheaply, enabling even relatively impoverished black urban families to own one. Moreover, transistors made the radio

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[29] Charles White, The Life and Times of Little Richard: Quasar of Rock (London: Pan Books, 1984); Chuck Berry, The Autobiography (London: Faber and Faber, 1987); James Brown with Bruce Tucker, James Brown: The Godfather of Soul (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1986). Also hear early Ray Charles songs "Greenbacks" and "It Should Have Been Me" for similarities with Jordan.

[30] Chapple and Garofalo, p.233

[31] George, p.26

[32] Chapple and Garofalo, p.236-7

much more portable than it was in its early days, meaning radios became more prevalent among the black community, appearing in shops and spilling over into the streets, reaching many more ears for longer periods of the day than radio had before. Another postwar technological innovation, television, indirectly helped rhythm and blues as well. Before World War Two, radio stations predominantly targeted white middle class audiences. However, in the early 1950s, as more white suburban families devoted their leisure time to television, top advertisers increasingly abandoned radio and devoted more money to television, too. Radio stations increasingly turned to small regional advertisers to recoup lost funds.[33] Among these smaller regional advertisers were businesses within the black community hoping to reach black audiences. All of these factors impelled radio stations to devote at least off-peak slots, if not the full programming of their stations on occasions, to black disc jockeys who played black music and promoted products and businesses looking to attract black consumers. Some stations proudly trumpeted their black audience to potential advertisers, as WXLW did (despite its clumsy and ambiguous wording) in a print advertisement in the early 1950s: "Serving and selling 328,000 Negroes in the St Louis area since 1948."[34]

Black disc jockeys were vital to attracting black audiences and to the success of rhythm and blues. Like the rhythm and blues music they played, these jockeys laced their speech with black vernacular, both southern-derived slang and northern jive talk. But before World War Two, when the target audience was predominantly middle class whites, the few blacks allowed on the airwaves were forced to adopt restrained styles acceptable to their core white audience. Generally, this restraint entailed avoiding black slang and suppressing any trace of a southern accent (if they had one). Not only were they keen to match the correct diction of their white counterparts, but these black announcers were also wary of confirming demeaning stereotypes propagated about blacks elsewhere in the media, as black radio announcer of the period Norman Spaulding explained: "with their race pride… they did not want to sound like Amos and Andy or Stepin Fetchit."[35] One of the first black disc jockeys to break this trend was Al Benson, aka the Midnight Gambler,

[33] Ibid., p.30

[34] George, p.40

[35] Ibid., p.18

who broadcast in Chicago in the 1940s and 1950s. Although middle class black publication Ebony disparagingly referred to his "distressing grappling with words over two syllables,"[36] it was probably Benson's very lack of refinement which made him clearly the most popular black disc jockey of his day. As Benson's contemporary Eddie O'Jay recalled:

> Benson killed the King's English and I don't know if he did it on purpose or not…. He wasn't pretending to be white. He sounded black. They [the black audience] knew he was and most of us were proud of the fact. 'Here's a black voice coming out of my little radio and we know it's him'.[37]

Benson's success alerted station managers that disc jockeys need not appeal to middle class white audiences; the urban black audience was large enough to encourage advertisers to support shows that lacked mainstream appeal.

One important function these black disc jockeys provided in racially-fraught communities was, through their advertising, to alert blacks to businesses that welcomed black patronage, which was vital information to new migrants. The products they promoted helped 'hip' rural migrants to the consumption habits of urban dwellers. In turn, these disc jockeys became important intermediaries between businesses and black consumers. As O'Jay remembers of Benson, "everybody had to see Al if they wanted to sell to the black market in Chicago, whether it was beer or rugs or Nu Nile hair cream."[38] Aside from the phenomenally popular Benson, whose salary exceeded $100,000, most disc jockeys were poorly paid and supplemented their incomes by moonlighting as promotional speakers for sponsors, music concert promoters, talent managers and record promoters. The latter income stream was later called "payola" (or pay-for-play), the practice of record companies compensating disc jockeys who helped records become hits. Because it was usually the individual disc jockey, and not the station owner or manager, who determined their own playlists, they generally played the music they liked. By the late 1940s, under the influence of their black jockeys many stations in large urban centres with wide coverage areas, like St Louis, Atlanta, Louisville, Memphis, Los Angeles, New

[36] Ibid., p.41

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

Orleans, Miami and Nashville, featured rhythm and blues in at least regular broadcast slots if not as the primary offering of the station.[39]

Like the rhythm and blues music they played, these black disc jockeys helped bridge the gap between the old southern rural traditions and the new urban black community. As Nelson George argues, "these nighttime motor mouths were very much the inheritors of the black oral tradition that spawned Br'er Rabbit, Mr. Mojo, and other rural tricksters created by Afro-Americans during their forced vacation in the 'New World'."[40] At the same time, the verbal traits these jockeys developed owed much to the improvisational rhythmic patterns of be-bop and jazz culture's jive talk. Lavada Durst, better known as KVET's Dr. Hep Cat in Austin, Texas, was typical of jockeys who sprinkled their broadcasts with be-bop inspired jive talk, as his catchphrase attests: "If you want to hip to the tip and bop to the top,/You get some made threads that just won't stop."[41] The earthy couplets and sexual innuendos of blues also inspired many catchphrases, such as Jack Gibson's sign on phrase while working for Louisville's WLOU in the early 1950s: "My father wasn't a jockey but he sure taught me how to ride! He said in the middle, then side to side. Ride, Jockey Jack, ride!"[42] These blends of jive and blues idioms helped rural migrants adapt to the jargon of the streets as well as infusing street slang with old country phrases.

White Disc Jockeys' Use of Rhythm and Blues

White disc jockeys also gravitated to rhythm and blues music. Some, like Memphis's Dewey Phillips and Nashville's Bill "Hoss" Allen, responded to audience requests by stacking their playlists with Louis Jordan, Wynonie Harris and other rhythm and blues artists. Some white Memphians steeped in racist traditions scorned Phillips for his support of black music, his exuberant vocal style that borrowed from black culture,

[39] Ibid., p.29

[40] Ibid., p.42

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., p.45

and his mingling with black fans, despite reports of veiled racism in his broadcasts.[43] Allen's deep vocal tone, jive phrasing and rhythm and blues playlist had white and black listeners constantly querying his race, which he refused to confirm during his broadcasts.[44] While Philips and Allen displayed an open affinity with and knowledge of black culture uncommon among whites in the Jim Crow South, jockeys of their ilk resolved a vexing dilemma for many radio station owners whose selective racism prohibited them from airing black disc jockeys but yearned for black audiences. Seeing an expanding market for both rhythm and blues music and "personality deejays" who spouted black jive at a time when the traditional white pop audience was declining (yet unwilling to hire black disc jockeys), these owners turned to whites whose affinity with black culture allowed them to play music popular with black audiences and to ventriloquise as blacks.

An example of this is the strange case of olive-skinned black jazz enthusiast Vernon Winslow. Moving from Chicago to New Orleans, the university graduate Winslow telephoned local radio station WJMR to apply for a disc jockey job, and was granted an interview because, as Winslow recounts, "they assumed I was white from talking to me on the phone, because I didn't sound like most blacks in New Orleans." Winslow's light complexion got him through the doors of the Jung Hotel, a whites-only hotel where the interview was conducted, but the interviewer finally asked Winslow: "Are you a nigger?" Although the station could not let a black man on the air, they offered Winslow the job of coaching a white man to sound black. Winslow named him Poppa Stoppa (from a local black expression), chose his playlist of black music and wrote his script peppered with black phrases like "Look at the gold tooth, Ruth," and "Wham, bam, thank you, ma'am." Following several successful months, one night, when the white Poppa Stoppa left the station prematurely, Winslow himself read part of the night's remaining script on air and was fired on the spot.[45] Although few listeners would have known, the station was unwilling to have an actual black man on air pretending to be the black character he had created. Such stations, especially in the South, did not want to

[43] Ibid., p.52

[44] Dancing in the Streets. "Whole Lotta Shakin'"

[45] George, p.52-3

seem 'integrationist' by employing blacks in prominent on-air positions because they feared alienating sponsors and white audiences.

The station's desire to have an imitation 'black' disc jockey (and the racist prohibitions against black broadcasters) was at least in part due to the expanding number of white listeners drawn to these supposedly exclusive black programs. In the early 1950s, whites, especially young whites, were seeking out black music both on the airwaves and in black record stores. Due to the way rhythm and blues was distributed, the only way whites could own these records was to venture into black neighbourhoods and buy these records at black stores, or have their local music store order them from independent distributors. Yet whites endured these obstacles, boosting rhythm and blues sales in the process. In 1951, Cleveland record store proprietor Leo Mintz found the sight of white teenagers buying up black records so beguiling that he invited white radio host Alan Freed, who played classical music on his show, to witness the event. Mintz prodded Freed to feature rhythm and blues on his show so that Mintz could sell more records to this enthusiastic audience. In July 1951, acquiring a taste for the music, Freed followed his classical show with "The Moondog Show," which featured black rhythm and blues exclusively.[46]

Freed's station, WJW, had the best coverage with its 50,000 watt signal, making him a widely heard, and widely influential, disc jockey. Freed was not the first disc jockey in the region to play rhythm and blues, but he was the first white jockey. Freed carefully studied the black disc jockeys whose stations reached Cleveland, like George "Hound Dog" Lorenz in Buffalo and Tom "Big Daddy" Donohue in Washington.[47] As black disc jockey Eddie O'Jay who worked for competitor WMAZ recalled, Freed imitated "every black artist you could think of… anything black he would say. Any slogans, he would say them. They [WJW] had a clear-watt station, so everybody knew

[46] This account of Freed's introduction to rhythm and blues is found in George, p.66-7, Chapple and Garofalo, p.56 and Deanna R. Adams, Rock 'n' Roll and the Cleveland Connection (Kent: Kent University Press, 2002), p.3-9. Adams's account differs slightly in that it claims Freed played rhythm and blues on his radio show in Akron before he moved to Cleveland, but concurs that it was Mintz who urged Freed to play rhythm and blues on WJW.

[47] Adams, p.5

him."[48] Freed, dubbing himself the "Moondog" and howling at the opening of each show, incorporated black lingo into his broadcasts, and began promoting, along with partners Mintz and Cleveland promoter Lew Platt, black rhythm and blues concerts in Cleveland. When a street performer sued Freed for stealing his "Moondog" moniker (and theme song), Freed changed the name of his show to "Alan Freed's Rock and Roll Party."[49]

Freed had occasionally referred to the music he played as "rock and roll," but after the name of his show changed, he exclusively called the music known elsewhere throughout the industry as 'rhythm and blues' 'rock and roll', which was black slang for sex.[50] The apocryphal story of how Freed adopted the term includes a radio interview with Billy Ward, a member of rhythm and blues group The Dominoes. As Ward dubiously recalled:

> We talked while "Sixty Minute Man" was playing. "You know, Billy," he said, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, "you've turned the music business upside down with this new music of yours. It's *not* authentic rhythm and blues, or jazz, or pop. It has no classification, really. We've got to find a name for it…." At this juncture our record boomed, "I rock 'em roll 'em all the night long, I'm a Sixty Minute Man!" Freed leaped to his feet. "That's it!" he cried hoarsely. "Rock and Roll! That's what it is." Immediately he broadcast his name for our sound. And all the trade publications fell in line with his thinking. To my knowledge – and *Billboard* confirmed it – this was the first time this music that spread-eagled the rhythm and blues, jazz and pop fields became labeled "Rock and Roll."[51]

The Dominoes' "Sixty Minutes Man," released in 1950 well before Freed started broadcasting rhythm and blues, was rather typical rhythm and blues, both in musical style and lyrical content, and it is unlikely Freed felt compelled to christen a new musical genre simply because the Dominoes' sound confounded him. The kernel of truth to the story was that black culture (in the form of the Dominoes' rhythm and blues song) inspired Freed to name what he perceived as a new musical style that could straddle several markets and attract diverse audiences. Freed's renaming of the music was more

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[48] George, p.66

[49] Adams, p.9

[50] Thomas Doherty, Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), p.91

[51] Philip H. Ennis, The Seventh Stream: The Emergence of Rocknroll in American Popular Music (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1992), p.18

an attempt to brand himself as arbiter of the music and consolidate his pre-eminence in this niche market, which became all the more necessary after his loss of the Moondog tag, than it was to diminish the importance of the music's black originators (as some critics have alleged) by replacing the racially specific 'rhythm and blues' label. Yet Freed's rechristening of the music is emblematic of the fate of black culture following the rise of rock n roll; Freed, who has an avowed affection for black music and culture, nevertheless appropriates the music for purposes at odds with its original function within the black community.

The Transformation from Rhythm and Blues to Rock n Roll

The term 'rock and roll' (or 'rock n roll') came to connote generational, rather than racial, specificity. Increasingly, rock n roll became associated with youthful rebellion against adult authorities, in part because of the controversial concerts Freed promoted. Freed's first shows, such as the Moondog Coronation Ball held at the Cleveland Arena in March 1952 (which he heavily promoted on his radio show) drew black audiences almost exclusively. This first concert drew such a huge black audience – a ticketing hitch meant that 25,000 arrived at the 10,000 capacity venue – that it precipitated a riot that inadvertently provided wide publicity for Freed's radio show. His next shows staged several months later, and again promoted only on his own radio show, attracted approximately equal numbers of blacks and white teenagers, who had been alerted to these riotous concerts by publicity.[52] By the time Freed sponsored shows in New York, Akron, Cleveland and New Jersey in 1954, police and city councils were growing increasingly wary of these interracial 'rock and roll' concerts and the media was increasingly hyperbolic in its reportage of these events. By this time, the term 'rock and roll' came to connote controversy over interracial co-mingling and fractious relations between predominantly white teenagers and adult authorities.

Although there was no overt change in musical style from rhythm and blues to rock n roll, there was a general shift in both song content and performance style to reflect

[52] Adams, p.5-9

the expectations of the young white audience.[53] As we saw in the last chapter, both Chuck Berry and Little Richard adapted their styles to widen their appeal to white rock n roll audiences and altered the lyrics of their songs to make them less racially specific and to ensure they would get distribution and national exposure without being censored or banned outright. Chuck Berry, for instance, wanted to make his music more "Anglopinionated" to appeal to the lucrative rock n roll market, changing "a colored boy named Johnny B. Goode" to a "country boy," and Little Richard expunged the explicitly sexual lyrics of "Tutti Frutti." Bill Haley's cover version of Joe Turner's rhythm and blues song "Shake, Rattle and Roll" was typical of the way rock n roll songs altered the sexual content of rhythm and blues songs. Displaying classic earthy blues metaphors, Turner's original song, boastful of his sexual prowess, is addressed to his young lover and contains lines like "I'm like a one-eyed cat peepin' in a seafood store/I can look at you til you ain't no child no more" and "When you wear those dresses, the sun comes shining through/I can't believe my eyes that all that mess belongs to you." When Haley covered the song, he changed the song's content to unrequited love, altering the lines to "I'm like a one-eyed cat peering in a seafood store/I can look at you and tell you don't love me no more" and "Wearin' those dresses, your hair done up nice/You look so warm but you're heart is cold as ice." No doubt commercial imperatives motivated this alteration. There was less commercial risk involved in the original's risqué content, which was expected to sell less than one hundred thousand copies to adult black consumers predominantly, than the cover version, which was expected to sell over a million copies to young whites primarily.

Paradoxically, rock n roll's lyrical content tamed the aggressive sexuality of rhythm and blues, yet rock n roll's live performances needed to be more sensationalistic and exaggerated to impress the youth audience who had come to associate rock n roll concerts with incendiary rebellion and vigour. As Johnny Otis, a white rhythm and blues musician who played with a black band, explains:

> We found that we moved the white audiences more by caricaturing the music, you know, overdoing the shit – falling on your back with the saxophone, kicking your legs up. And if we did too much of that for a black audience they'd tell us –

[53] Chapple and Garofalo make a similar argument about rock n roll's tame lyrics and exaggerated performances, p.233-4

> "Enough of that shit – play some music!" That's why Fats Domino and B.B. King would go over with the black audiences more than Little Richard – although Little Richard was big with the black audience. But still if he got into theatrics, you know, pretty soon the black audience would say – "No. Play some music."[54]

The problem for black performers, as we saw in the last chapter, was to mitigate the historical stereotypes surrounding black male sexuality that made many whites regard the black body with fear and fascination - and often led to violence against blacks - yet also excite young white audiences. Little Richard did this by seeking to defuse his sexual threat, while Chuck Berry sought to diminish the cultural markers of his blackness, each with a varying degree of success. White performers who evoked both sexuality and an air of blackness like Elvis Presley did not face the threat of extreme violence and censure like black performers yet they still encountered much resistance to their alleged incitement of miscegenation as I will explain in more detail later.

Musically, then, there was little difference between rhythm and blues and rock n roll, as Billboard noted when it described rock n roll as "a popularized form of r&b" in 1956.[55] The main differences are attributable to their target audiences; "r&b" reached a minority black audience and rock n roll reached a "popular" audience of white teenagers. This difference was crucial to shaping the respective forms of music. Rhythm and blues appealed to an urban black audience who sought a more danceable music than be-bop and sought a music that confronted the realities of the postwar black community. Rhythm and blues reflected the ambivalence with which many recent black migrants to urban areas viewed their southern rural pasts, combining country blues and folk traditions with electrified music and song content that echoed the urban experience. Black disc jockeys steeped in black oral traditions and urban hipsterism helped orient new migrants to city ways and disseminated rhythm and blues as specifically black music.

Because white teenagers in the suburbs tuned in to these jockeys, they too began consuming black rhythm and blues, helping to send songs like Louis Jordan's "Ain't Nobody Here But Us Chickens" (1946) and the Chords' "Sh'Boom" (1954) into the mainstream pop charts. Alerted to the popularity of rhythm and blues among white

[54] Chapple and Garofalo, p.234

[55] Ibid., p.234

teenagers, many music producers and promoters redoubled efforts to target this market, especially after the tremendous nationwide success of Bill Haley's "Rock Around the Clock" in 1955 on the back of its appearance in youth-oriented film Blackboard Jungle. Not all rhythm and blues was suitable for the nationwide distribution and media exposure necessary to reach the youth market, either because its performers were too old or their songs too 'earthy', or because of the many racist obstacles to exposing black performers to mass audiences.[56] Often producers and promoters solved this problem by having a white group cover the song and by excising its suggestive content. By making it a white-targeted rock n roll song, producers took advantage of these white groups' superior access to promotion and distribution. The term 'rock n roll' signified a transformation from rhythm and blues, a black music that some young whites consumed, to music specifically for youths. Affluent white middle class teenagers in particular initially consumed a specifically black cultural form, which was then transformed to cater to the desires and interests of the white youth audience. White teenagers' consumption of this music did not necessarily indicate white youth's impulse toward integration, as Lipsitz would have it, but rather signalled youth's desire for a culture distinct from, and in opposition to, adult culture.

In fact, some young whites were averse to making consumer choices that could be construed as 'integrationist'; they avoided purchasing 'black' records. Freed's term 'rock n roll' helped broaden the appeal of the music, breaking down the resistance of many white consumers to buying records designated as 'rhythm and blues', which was considered exclusively black music.[57] While many young whites enthusiastically bought records produced for the black rhythm and blues market and made that market much

[56] The irony is, of course, that the first white rock n roller was Bill Haley, a chubby man in his mid-30s with a receding hairline. He was, though, greatly aided as a live performer by the athleticism of his band, especially his saxophonist who could bend back and touch his head on the floor while playing solos. Ennis, p.222; Chapple and Garofalo, p.234

[57] As Altschuler argues, the nomenclature 'rock n roll' enabled white consumers "to affirm – without having to think about it – that rock 'n' roll was a distinctive, not a derivative, musical form." Altschuler, p.23. Despite the term's origin in black culture, 'rock n roll' made the music seem, at best, racially neutral and, at worst, white. To underscore this, in 2004 American beer brewing company Miller's celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of rock n roll by featuring pictures and brief profiles of rock n roll's key personnel, from Elvis Presley to Blondie, on beer cans, but failed to feature a single black performer or band. "Miller Apologizes to Black Community for Rock 'n' Roll Promotion" in Black Issues in Higher Education, vol.21, iss.15 (September 2004), p.10

more lucrative, other young whites were ambivalent – they enjoyed rhythm and blues on the radio but were reluctant to purchase it. As Sam Phillips notes:

> It got so you could sell a half million copies of a rhythm and blues record. These records appealed to white youngsters just as Uncle Silas [Payne's] songs and stories used to appeal to me…. But there was something in many of these youngsters that resisted buying this music. The Southern ones especially felt a resistance that even they didn't quite understand. They liked the music, but they weren't sure whether they ought to like it or not. So I got to thinking how many records you could sell if you could find white performers who could play and sing in the same exciting, alive way.[58]

Indeed, white listeners' ambivalence accounted in large degree for white performers' ascent to the top of the rock n roll field. Bill Haley had the first popular record to be widely acknowledged as a 'rock n roll' hit. Disc jockey Alan Freed gave the music its name and was its most prominent spokesperson, calling himself "The King of Rock n Roll."[59] Only white performers – Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins - achieved the remarkable feat of topping all three charts (pop, country and rhythm and blues) simultaneously. And Elvis Presley became its most popular, most discussed and most prominent practitioner. This is not to say that blacks' participation was negligible; Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Bo Diddley, Jackie Wilson, The Coasters, Larry Williams and others had at least one hit with the predominantly white rock n roll audience, and Berry and Little Richard consistently scored hits with this audience. But these black rock n rollers' participation was often erratic. Their ongoing prominence among white audiences depended upon their abilities to negotiate the obstacles impeding black male performance in white racist mainstream society, and to attract a young white audience that yearned for black culture but were more comfortable with white performers' imitations of blackness.

Rock n roll comprised a vital site for the formation of youth culture, providing young people with a cultural space that was clearly delineated from, and opposed to, adult culture. Many adults were dismayed by their children's consumption of both black performers and white performers who were clearly appropriating black culture. White

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[58] Guralnick, Last Train, p.96

[59] On the compilation album Alan Freed's Memory Lane Freed opens the album with: "Hello, this is Alan Freed, the King of Rock n Roll." Alan Freed's Memory Lane. Various Artists. LP. Roulette Records, 1963.

youth's attraction to black culture symbolised cultural miscegenation that radically threatened Cold War America's racial boundaries. But, ultimately, the revolutionary potential of this cultural miscegenation was vitiated both by white "theft" of black culture and by racial ideologies that cast 'blackness' as the exotic 'other'.

White Rock n Roll and Racial Crossing

Most prominent white rock n rollers had significant links to black culture. Bill Haley, for example, changed his musical style, from country and western to the upbeat rhythm and blues that Louis Jordan pioneered, after he noticed the popularity of this form of music while working for a radio station in Chester, Pennsylvania in the late 1940s and early 1950s. His country group The Saddlemen covered Jackie Brenston's rhythm and blues hit "Rocket 88" (Brenston's original was produced by Sam Phillips), and soon changed his group's name to Bill Haley and the Comets, reportedly in an effort to identify the group with this song.[60] Subsequently, Haley covered other rhythm and blues songs like Louis Jordan's "Choo Choo Ch' Boogie," Joe Turner's "Shake, Rattle and Roll" and "Flip, Flop and Fly, and Bobby Charles' "See You Later Alligator," and tinged other songs with black slang and intertextual references to rhythm and blues hits, like "Two Hound Dogs," "Birth of the Boogie" and "Rock-A-Beatin' Boogie."

Like Haley, as we have seen, Alan Freed and Sam Phillips were both drawn to black music. While commercial imperatives motivated Freed to include rhythm and blues in his programming, Phillips was drawn to alternatives to the pop songs with which he grew bored while working for a mainstream Memphis radio station in the late 1940s. He opened a small recording office to moonlight as an independent record producer in 1950, reasoning that "the Negroes were the only ones who had any freshness left in their music; and there was no place in the South they could go to record." Seeking to attract "Negroes with field mud on their boots and patches in their overalls… battered instruments and unfettered techniques,"[61] he sold records by the likes of Howlin' Wolf, Jackie Brenston, Ike Turner and B. B. King to record labels like Chess in Chicago and Modern Records in

[60] Ennis, p.220. One must also note the obvious temptation to associate the group with Halley's Comet.

[61] Glenn C. Altschuler, All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.25

Los Angeles. Despite suffering many racist barbs from white colleagues in the music industry for fraternising with blacks, Phillips continued to record black performers once he founded his Sun label, until Elvis Presley's success encouraged him to search for other white performers with a 'black feel'.

Among Phillips's discoveries were Billy Lee Riley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash and Charlie Rich, all of whom had significant connections with black culture and black music. Perkins grew up in a poor white Mississippi family and by the time he was ten was working as a sharecropper picking cotton with, he recalls, "forty and fifty black people picking and chopping in the field with me. And I listened to that music. That music without guitars." John Westbrook, a black co-worker, not only taught Perkins to pick three hundred pounds of cotton a day, but also sold Perkins his first guitar, and taught him how to play it, along with the blues licks that became the foundation of Perkins' style. Similarly, Riley's family migrated around northern Arkansas farming cotton, and Riley learned music "on the plantation, with the old black blues singers," he says, boasting that by the age of twelve he was "playing guitar with these guys and playing harmonica and singing the blues right along with 'em." Rich was from a wealthier family and his father managed plantations, but Rich recalled learning blues from a black sharecropper named C. J. Allen who used to drink and play music with his father.[62] Lewis and Presley learned their music initially in church, but both frequented black juke joints and clubs, as did Perkins, Riley and Cash, often sneaking in against their parents' wishes, and these ventures were vital to honing their subsequent musical styles.[63] Not coincidentally, the breakthrough hits for both Presley and Lewis were covers of songs that were originally hits in the rhythm and blues charts for black performers; "That's Alright, Mama" for Big Boy Crudup and "Whole Lotta Shakin" by Big Maybelle.

In some more extreme cases, there was an explicit race-crossing desire among white rock n rollers. When his mother asked him what it was like to tour with "Negro" performers, Buddy Holly replied: "Oh, we're Negroes, too, we get to feeling that's what

[62] Perkins, Rich and Riley are discussed in Pete Daniel, "Rhythm of the Land" in Agricultural History, v68, n4 (Fall 1994): 1-22

[63] See Nick Tosches, Hellfire: The Jerry Lee Lewis Story (London: Plexus, 1982), Peter Guralnick, Feel Like Going Home: Portraits in Blues and Rock 'n' Roll (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2003), and Guralnick, Last Train to Memphis

we are."[64] The most extreme example is Greek-born Johnny Otis, who, like jazzman Mezz Mezzrow in the 1940s, became a "voluntary Negro,"[65] living in black neighbourhoods and playing music with black performers exclusively, and even regarding himself as a black man. In his autobiography, Otis regrets what he sees as his abandonment of 'pure' black rhythm and blues music for the more lucrative white rock n roll market when he signed for major label Capitol: "I tried to chase the almighty dollar and listened to bad advice from profit-minded sources when I should have been my own Black self, recording my own Black R&B sounds, and not have gone into that contrived rock and roll shit."[66] Similarly, songwriting duo Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, as Leiber puts it, "led semi-black existences…. We had black girlfriends, we used to constantly be in totally black nightclubs and dancehalls… we might have been the only white faces in the joint that night but no one was ever rude or aggressive." According to Stoller, "we thought of ourselves as black. We were mistaken, but that's what we wanted to be. We aspired to be black and to be able to make the music that was black and the poetry that comes from blues music."[67]

Although not immersing themselves so fully in black culture, most white Sun performers sought out black cultural spaces, frequenting black juke joints and night clubs. These Sun performers, including Presley (who I will discuss in more depth shortly), Cash, Roy Orbison, Perkins, Riley and Lewis, sought out black fashions from clothing stores on Beale Street, the heart of Memphis's black commercial district, and consciously dressed like black rhythm and blues singers. Favouring black and pink two-toned clothes, Sun performers' flamboyant attire contrasted strikingly with the typical "crew cuts and muscles" style of Southern white males. As Charlie Rich admitted, "We'd dress like the

[64] Lipsitz, "'Against the Wind'," p.276

[65] See Gayle Wald, "Mezz Mezzrow and the Voluntary Negro Blues" in Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Vebel (eds), Race and the Subject of Maculinities (Durham: Durham University Press, 1997)

[66] Johnny Otis, Upside Your Head! Rhythm and Blues on Central Avenue (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), p.xxvii

[67] The History of Rock n' Roll. Episode Two, "Good Rockin' Tonight." Dir. Bud Friedgen. Time-Life DVD, 2004.

blacks did. You know, a little bit of the rebel."[68] They also modelled their vocal styles on black performers. Presley particularly was enamoured with black gospel and rhythm and blues. Presley's swagger, greased hair and extravagant clothes, all inspired by his rhythm and blues heroes, precipitated his social ostracism from his peers at his all-white southern high school.

Critics have celebrated white rock n rollers' attraction to black culture as indication of a progressive will towards integration and rebellion against southern racism on the one hand, and condemned it as clear evidence of the theft of black culture on the other. White rock n rollers' attraction to and deliberate identification with black culture defied the Jim Crow South's prohibitions against interracial interaction, but it did not necessarily indicate an unequivocal will towards integration. Race-crossing is, after all, an inherently ambiguous undertaking. Racial mimicry or impersonation at once attests that there is a line to be crossed – that is, that there are essential characteristics that differentiate white from black – but that that line is permeable, fluid and unstable. For whites to attempt to (or, in Johnny Otis's case, claim they have already undergone) 'racechange' suggests that whites can transcend racial boundaries, and that the features of metamorphosing whiteness can somehow be substituted for the markings of essential blackness. On the one hand, then, racechange is subversive in dissolving the hierarchy that buttresses white supremacy but, on the other hand, it does this only by escaping 'downward' into the culture of the discrete essentialised other. In this way the racechanger relies on the preservation of a line to be crossed while his or her actions invalidate the basis of the line.

Yet critics' allegations that this race-crossing constituted deliberate theft and exploitation of black culture for mercenary reasons are also unconvincing. This allegation could be most cogently levelled at Freed and Haley, but, although both were drawn to black culture by sensing its commercial potential, their gravitation to black culture also involved great commercial risks. Freed was already a successful classical music disc jockey who risked losing sponsorship and audience share for promoting black music, and, especially, integrated audiences at his concerts. Haley also risked alienating his admittedly small white country following when he adapted his music. For whites like

[68] Daniel, Lost Revolutions, p.149-50

Leiber and Stoller, Sam Phillips, Presley and Lewis, interaction with black culture promised not material reward but ostracism from mainstream white society and alienation from conventional sources of wealth and success. Had material wealth and success among their communities been their primary motivations, Leiber and Stoller would have crafted Tin Pan Alley pop hits; Phillips would have recorded Mitch Miller-esque novelty tunes or country singers; Presley would have pursued his electricians' apprenticeship, and Lewis would have stuck with Seminary School. Yet Lewis's expulsion from bible school for playing "boogie woogie" (an up-tempo rhythm and blues style unmistakably evocative of black secular music) piano to the congregation was typical of each man's rebellious and self-marginalising attraction to black culture.

Elvis Presley's Racial Crossing

The critical debate concerning the motivation for white rock n rollers' attraction to and appropriation of black culture has tended to centre on one figure, Elvis Presley. At one polarity of the debate, critics have lauded Presley for his studious affinity with black culture that enabled him to reproduce authentic rhythm and blues styles, offer a gateway to black culture for white audiences long isolated from black culture, and encourage by example interracial cultural contact that implicitly heralded racial integration. At the other polarity, critics have condemned Presley for copying not only black musical styles but also black clothing styles, hairstyles and dancing styles and becoming obscenely wealthy in the process. Furthermore, to these critics Presley overshadows black originators in both wealth and fame thanks mainly to his whiteness that affords him privileges denied to black performers who inspired Presley's style and exceeded his talent.

In arguing the former position, Michael Bertrand extensively and strenuously argues against critics who deride Presley as a thief of black culture and a latter-day minstrel. Yet, his characterisations of these critics and his own defence of Presley brings the limitations of his argument into relief:

> Their accounts of Presley as an unenlightened, brazen, bland, white redneck usurper of black culture is [sic] not complex. In a make-believe capitalist world mysteriously absent of class inequalities and where all whites were the same, his 'crime' was becoming economically successful while performing a music associated with working-class black culture. In an imaginary capitalist world where commodification surprisingly failed to dehumanize all popular culture

> products including performing artists, Presley 'stole' the songs and style of his black neighbors. He became rich and famous while more qualified black contemporaries remained poor and obscure. In a dream-like capitalist world where all whites held positions of prominence that negated their cognizance of powerlessness, Presley was a mimic who could not grasp the meaning behind the blues.[69]

In arguing against these critics, Bertrand cites the poverty of Presley's family, which frequently forced them to live within poor black neighbourhoods, as evidence of Presley's 'authentic' black style; in other words, that Presley could not be an "unenlightened, brazen… mimic" because he knew and loved black culture too well. Presley's authenticity "derived from an unlikely combination of poor economic conditions, low status, and an open-minded racial perspective uncommon among southern whites who came of age before the post-World War Two era." As such, "it is apparent that Elvis Presley's music and characteristics were not inferior attempts at burlesque or imitation but rather illuminators of a common experience of poverty and caste."[70]

Bertrand is indisputably correct to note that class inequities existed in both black and white worlds. Yet, what Roediger calls "wages of whiteness" differentiated whites from blacks, and these wages were not always explicitly economic. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than under Jim Crow, where whites, regardless of their economic status, had access to better social facilities, education and employment opportunities than blacks. Moreover, impoverished whites were more likely to fiercely protect the privileges their whiteness afforded them against moves to dismantle Jim Crow than to feel a kinship with their poor black neighbours. Following the Brown v Board of Education decision that ordered the desegregation of schools, for example, many poor and working class whites vigorously opposed school integration alongside middle class and elite southern whites, as shown during the heated confrontations that took place at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957.[71] (The fact that officials chose to integrate Central High rather

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[69] Bertrand, p.195

[70] Ibid., p.218

[71] Daniel, Lost Revolutions, p.255-7, 270

than the more affluent Hall High School also fuelled the anger of white working class parents.[72]) In other words, it was possible to be white and of similar economically deprived status as poor blacks yet enjoy the privileges of Jim Crow, as Presley did in going to Hume High, eating at white restaurants, and playing on white sports teams. In Presley's musical career too, whiteness undoubtedly afforded him greater opportunities – namely, to perform to segregated crowds in the South as well as integrated crowds in the North, to get airplay on both black and white (once his whiteness was confirmed) radio stations, to air on television in both the North and the South, and to perform in a sexually suggestive manner – than the black performers who inspired him.

Bertrand also claims that the white mainstream scorned and derided poor white southerners as much if not more than blacks, and that as a poor white southerner Presley's alienation from the mainstream provided him a natural feeling for the blues. Leaving aside questions of whom was most oppressed, it is not wholly convincing to attribute Presley's gravitation to and immersion in black culture to what Bertrand refers to as Presley's "unlikely combination of poor economic conditions, low status, and an open-minded racial perspective." Country music has traditionally accommodated such a combination, and as such would have offered a more logical outlet for Presley. Although, as Lipsitz points out, many country musicians have concealed the mixed racial origins of their songs and styles, others have embraced links with black culture and incorporated blues songs into their repertoires or blues licks into their country songs. One prominent example of this explicit acknowledgement of racial cross-pollination between blues and country occurred in 1930 when the biggest country star of the era Jimmie Rodgers recorded "Blue Yodel No. 9" with black musicians Louis Armstrong on trumpet and Earl Hines on piano.[73] In another example closer to Presley's era, country legend Hank Williams learned guitar from his black mentor Tee-tot, and incorporated blues licks and phrases into the country songs he played. Yet, none of the country musicians who shared with Presley poverty, "low status and open-minded racial perspectives" embraced black culture to the extent that they modelled their dress, their vocal delivery and their dancing styles on black musicians as Presley did. In other words, Presley's poverty, "low status

[72] Ibid., p.257

[73] Lipsitz, Class and Culture, p.203

and open-minded racial perspectives" would have been more likely to lead him into the country music field that had a long, though often concealed, history of racial cross-pollination than into the self-marginalising emulation of blackness that frightened members of his (white) church.[74] Rather, as I will discuss later, Presley's attraction to black culture was more likely motivated by romantic notions of black masculinity that pervaded 1950s culture.

Moreover, Bertrand's assertion that Presley's proximity to and love of black culture and music invalidates allegations of cultural theft and misappropriation, of being what Bertrand calls a "latter-day minstrel," is unconvincing. As Eric Lott points out, a similar case could be made for the early practitioners of blackface minstrelsy who extensively studied the black culture that they sought to reproduce on stage. For example, nineteenth century blackface minstrel Ben Cotton claimed to have studied and socialised with blacks on Mississippi riverboats and took pride in his ability to sing "black": "I was the first white man they had seen who sang as they did… we were brothers for the time being and were perfectly happy."[75] Minstrels often considered their performance to be a tribute to the black culture they loved, albeit a clumsy tribute masked in gross prosthetic racial signifiers (woolly wigs, blackened faces, widened lips, fake noses) and derisive humour that worked to differentiate their white selves from the black referent. As we will see later, Presley also paid tribute to the black originators he aspired to emulate. His mimicry occurred at a time when the practice of blackface was on the wane (though he reportedly performed at his high school's minstrel show[76]). His imitations of blackness were expressed more through gesture than masking of the skin. Presley lacked the distancing devices like the burnt cork and derisive humour of nineteenth century minstrels. Yet, like the minstrels, his black-styled gestures were affectations that signified that Presley was taking on characteristics of the racial other.

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[74] Bertrand, p.208

[75] Lott, p.478-9

[76] David Roediger, Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p.216

Bertrand argues that comparisons between Presley and blackface minstrels are incompatible with assertions that Presley was also a thrilling performer with a genuine love for black culture:

> If [Presley] has come to represent no more than a safe blackface performer who capitalized on black forms and enjoyed the luxury of jettisoning make-up at will, few of his contemporaries were sure that any reverse transformation was possible or permanent. Unlike his nineteenth-century predecessors, no one knew when or if Presley would (or could) discard his 'black' persona once he left the stage.[77]

Firstly, there was little that was "safe" about the blackface performer. As Lott emphasises, the constant tension that haunted the minstrel show was that between racial performance and racial essentialism. That is, on the one hand, the blackface minstrel worked to underscore the notion of racial difference between white and black, helping to ratify the notion of a superior white identity in negative inversion to the derided black being represented on the blackface stage. As Roediger and Lott argue, this display was crucial to the construction of a unified white American working class identity that bridged ethnic differences. Yet, simultaneously, the blackface performer's supposed authenticity – their ability to "become black" – subverted notions of racial superiority by showing race to be a porous, fluid and unstable construction. Moreover, blackface minstrelsy's obsessive fixation on black culture betrayed the power of blackness to fascinate, attract and captivate white audiences and performers, a power at odds with racial ideologies that cast blacks as inferior and repulsive to whites. These tensions were tenuously contained by minstrelsy's derisive humour and grotesque caricatures of blackness. By contrast, Presley, as I will soon argue, exhibited few of minstrelsy's 'distancing' devices, instead explicitly acknowledging his admiration of and debt to black culture. Yet, like minstrels, Presley also demonstrated the transcendental power of whiteness to imitate and even 'inhabit' the racial other while simultaneously foregrounding the instability of racial categories.

Secondly, Presley demonstrated just such a penchant for discarding his "black persona" in two performances of the song "Hound Dog" during nationwide television appearances in 1956. In the first performance of "Hound Dog," during Presley's second Milton Berle Show appearance, Presley fully embodied his "black persona." But in the second, during his only Steve Allen Show performance several weeks later, Presley did

[77] Bertrand, p.194-5

indeed discard this "black persona" by excising traces of black culture from his performance of "Hound Dog," emphasising the tremendous advantages that Presley, as a white performer, enjoyed over his black counterparts. When his combination of 'blackness' and overt sexuality sparked national outrage, Presley was able to abandon his 'blackness'.

"Hound Dog" and Presley's Racial Performance

Appearing on the Milton Berle Show on June 5 1956, Presley unmistakably evoked styles both endemic to rhythm and blues and inextricably linked in the public mind with juvenile delinquency and civil unrest. Following Milton Berle's introduction, Presley took the stage dressed in a white checked jacket, a two-tone shirt with sharp collar and loose-fitting trousers, all cut to typical zoot suit shape. His greased-up hair, dyed jet black and heavily lacquered with Crown Royal Pomade, the favoured hair product of rhythm and blues stars, flopped over his face erratically. Unlike his previous television appearances, for the first time Presley was without a guitar, freeing his body to gyrate and quiver with the music; black musicians like Ike Turner, Bo Diddley and Little Willie John would later claim that Presley learned his moves from them. Regardless of their specific origin, his gyrations that accentuated the sexual inferences of the song, like his hair and clothes, were clearly lifted from black culture.

The song "Hound Dog" also had substantial connections to black culture, although both the song's origins and Presley's immediate source of inspiration to cover the song complicate its racial specificity. In 1953, black singer Big Mama Thornton had a hit on the rhythm and blues charts with her original version of the song. She would later decry the fact that she never saw royalties from the sales of Presley's version, arguing that her vocals were integral to the song's arrangement and thus composition. The royalties would eventually go to the three white men who wrote the song: Jerry Leiber, Mike Stoller and Johnny Otis, who led the band that backed Thornton. As discussed earlier, each man considered themselves, or at least aspired to be, black, and the song they wrote betrays their knowledge of and close proximity to black culture. Using blues couplets and sexual content couched in metaphor and black vernacular, the song has the narrator reject her unfaithful lover. Presley, as an avid student of rhythm and blues, surely

knew the original song, yet, complicating the matter further, based his cover on a parody version performed by white Las Vegas lounge act Freddie Bell and the Bellboys. The Bellboys' version, which Presley had witnessed during his first (and unsuccessful) Las Vegas concert dates, altered the lyrics to make the song's narrator less obviously female, and the song's sexual inferences more abstruse, and thus its connections with black culture less immediate and overt. Presley's version, despite these altered lyrics, reiterated the song's unmistakable links with black culture, not only through his hair, clothes and dance, but also in his vocal delivery that was modelled after Thornton's gruff, growling 'down home' style.

Presley's performance proved to be one of the decade's most controversial television appearances, and critics lambasted Presley for his blatant sexuality and his links to blackness. Presley's perceived sexual vulgarity, his 'blackness' and his gender ambiguity, as evidenced by frequent references to female burlesque dancers, were constantly yoked together in condemnations of Presley's performance. Television critic Jack O'Brien of the New York Journal-American was typical of this castigation when he complained that "Elvis Presley wiggled and wriggled with such abdominal gyrations that burlesque bombshell Georgia Southern really deserves equal time to reply in gyrating kind. He can't sing a lick, makes up for his vocal shortcomings with the weirdest and plainly planned, suggestive animation short of an aborigine's mating dance."[78] Ben Gross, of the *Daily News* alleged that popular music "has reached its lowest depths in the 'grunt and groin' antics of one Elvis Presley…. Elvis, who rotates his pelvis, was appalling musically. Also, he gave an exhibition that was suggestive and vulgar, tinged with the kind of animalism that should be confined to dives and bordellos."[79] The moment that aroused the most attention was Presley's apparently spontaneous final verse, which he performed after the band had finished the song. As the applause began, Presley launched into a slow, grinding bluesy rendition of the chorus, with his knees bent and quivering and his pelvis thrusting suggestively. The band fell in behind him; drummer D. J. Fontana recalled that he drew on his experience as a strip-tease musician to follow Presley. New

[78] Rodman, p.151

[79] Guralnick, Last Train to Memphis, p.285

York Times critic Jack Gould described the moment as "a rock-and-roll variation on one of the most standard acts in show business: the virtuoso of the hootchy-kootchy."[80]

The Berle Show controversy threatened to curtail his planned Steve Allen Show performance booked for July 1, just under a month after Presley's appearance on Berle. (Presley was booked on Allen before he made his infamous Berle performance.) Responding to public pressure, Allen stated that "there has been a demand that I cancel him from our show. As of now he is still booked for July 1, but I have not come to a final decision on his appearance. If he does appear, you can rest assured that I will not allow him to do anything that will offend anyone." After several weeks of negotiation, NBC, the television station carrying Allen's show, announced that it would present a "revamped, purified and somewhat abridged Presley." Columnist Harriet Van Horne reported: "He'll wear white tie and tails, glory be…. And he'll stand reasonably still while singing…. With so much Bowdlerizing, he may well sing 'Come, Sweet Death' as far as his career is concerned."[81] On the night of July 1, Allen announced on his show that "tonight we're presenting Elvis Presley in his, heh heh, what you might call his first comeback," before introducing him as "the new Elvis Presley." Presley sheepishly sidled onto the stage dressed in tuxedo, white gloves and tails, looking decidedly uncomfortable and mumbling that "it's not often I get to wear the, uh, suit and tails and…" before trailing off. The first song Presley performed was his new single, "I Want You, I Need You, I Love You." He performed it in a restrained, almost bored fashion, backed for the first time by white vocal group the Jordanaires, who gave the song a polished feel reminiscent more of mainstream white pop than black rhythm and blues.

The ensuing performance of "Hound Dog" was an attempt to nullify Presley's explosive combination of black culture and sexuality that was so controversial on the Berle Show. The contrived performance removed all traces of 'blackness' from Presley. Presley's movements were as stiff and restrained as his formal attire; gone were the pelvic thrusts that so controversially evoked the song's sexual content. Further denying the sexual inferences in the song, Allen wheeled out a basset hound that Presley wearily sang "Hound Dog" to. Cupping the face of the sad looking dog, Presley limply sang "you

[80] Rodman, p.151

[81] Guralnick, p.287

ain't nothing but a hound dog," literalising the song's content, transforming the promiscuous lover into a real life drooling dog, and severing the song's links with black vernacular. After the commercial break that followed, Allen involved Presley in the "Range Roundup" comedy skit, where Allen played "Big Steve" strumming a toy guitar and singing "Turkey in the Straw" and "Tumbleweed Presley" sang a "country and western" song. In the context of the Allen Show's severance of Presley's connections with black culture, the skit, although clearly contemptuous of his southern roots, rehabilitated Presley as unambiguously white; from Allen's vantage, a permissible - albeit laughably vulgar – 'hillbilly'member of the white hegemonic consensus.

This demonstration that Presley's "black persona" could be discarded did not necessarily make him "safe" in Bertrand's sense, at least not permanently. Presley was still controversial enough – and his pelvis considered sufficiently inflammatory – to warrant him being filmed only above the waist by the time he performed his third number on the Ed Sullivan Show in January 1957.[82] But this demonstration did emphasise the fluidity of Presley's persona. Some fans disappointed in the Allen Show performance picketed the RCA building the next day, where Presley was holding a press conference. Their picket signs acknowledged Presley's mutability and requested that he mutate back, reading: "We Want the GYRATIN' Elvis" and "We Want the Real Elvis."[83] Yet it was Presley's restrained performance that convinced Ed Sullivan, who hosted the top-rated variety show on television and had earlier vowed never to allow Presley on his show, to book Presley. The Allen Show performance demonstrated that the most explosive elements of his performance – namely his combination of blackness and sexuality – could be harnessed, censored or discarded completely.

In this sense, Presley resembled the blackface minstrels of the nineteenth century who erased their 'blackness' when they cleaned their faces at the end of a night's performance. The main difference between Presley and the minstrels was, though, where the minstrels' inhabitations of blackness worked to underscore through derisive humour the distance between the white working class audience (as well as the white performer) and the black referent of the minstrel act, Presley's performance style, notwithstanding

[82] Rodman, p.153

[83] Guralnick, p.297

his Allen Show appearance, explicitly acknowledged its debt to and admiration of black culture. As the protestations of Presley's fans for the "real Elvis" to return suggest, Presley's inhabitation of black culture was more than mere "theft." Both his fans and even Presley himself, up to this point, were clearly invested in the threat to the racial order that Presley's 'blackness' – however 'borrowed' – posed.

Contrary to Bertrand's argument that posits love and theft as mutually exclusive terms, Presley could perform a credible approximation of black artists that indicated his deep knowledge and admiration of black culture while appropriating the culture of the other. Although a mercenary agenda certainly did not motivate Presley's appropriation, he indisputably profited enormously from his imitations of black artists, and because of the privileges he enjoyed as a white performer in 1950s popular culture he was far more successful than the black artists he imitated. As his Allen Show appearance showed, Presley could discard the "black persona" when it was expedient. Moreover, despite his vast knowledge and experience of black culture, historically entrenched racial ideologies surrounding black masculinity affected Presley's imitations of blackness. As I will detail later, this arguably produced in Presley a sense of failing to embody blackness convincingly, as if the power of the mythology rendered attempts to embody blackness futile. In this self-defeating ambition to embody blackness, Presley resembled members of the intellectual vanguard of the 1950s, which included avant garde artists and Beat poets and writers like Jack Kerouac. Like Presley, they admired blackness and sought to embody it. Yet their romanticised constructions of the masculine racial other imbued it with such power that attempts to possess and inhabit the other were inevitably self-defeating. An examination of their relationship with the racial other shows that romanticised notions of black culture permeated both popular and high culture.

White Melancholia and Romanticised Blackness

Many historians have noted the importance that 'blackness' has played in the construction of American whiteness. As David Roediger argues, ever since the beginning of American colonisation, blacks have been the repository for what white society "left

behind" in the move to capitalist accumulation, civil society and industrialisation.[84] George Rawick suggests that English traders and profit-minded settlers in America "met the West African as a reformed sinner meets a comrade of his previous debaucheries" in that in the construction of blackness the 'civilised' white created "a pornography of his former life…. In order to insure that he would not slip back into the old ways or act out half-suppressed fantasies, he must see a tremendous difference between his reformed self and those whom he formerly resembled."[85] During industrial rationalisation of the early nineteenth century, the difference between the white "reformed self" and the 'primitive' black was expressed primarily in attitudes toward work; one of the binding features of working class white identity was discipline to the demands of industrial work. According to Roediger, racially charged derogatory epithets like 'coon', 'buck' and 'Mose' described "whites who had not internalized capitalist work discipline and whose places in the new world of wage labor were problematic to stereotyping blacks."[86] Such terms were designed to shame whites who were unwilling or unable to conform to the demands of industrialisation and were thus like 'primitive' blacks.

But these terms also underscored ambivalence towards the pre-industrial past that was both "scorned and missed," for blackness was also associated with "preindustrial joys, with entertainment prowess and with 'natural humor'," traits lacking in industrialised white society and only accessible in the increasingly prevalent practice of whites applying blackface and "acting black for a time."[87] "Blacking up" licensed behaviours that were prohibited in respectable industrialised white society. To "become black" was also to exit white civility, to throw off inhibitions and to experience carnal pleasures that were not permissible in the new world of wage labour. Carnivals and festivals that allowed dressing up and masking became vital sites for whites to release themselves by "becoming black." Roediger argues that "[p]sychoanalytically, the

[84] David Roediger, The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class (London: Verso, 1991), p.95

[85] Quoted in Ibid., p.95

[86] Ibid., p.100

[87] Ibid., p.97-104

smearing of soot or blacking over the body represents the height of polymorphous perversity, an infantile playing with excrement or dirt. It is the polar opposite of the anal retentiveness usually associated with accumulating capitalist and Protestant cultures."[88]

Traces of these racial notions that romanticised blacks as bearers of the pre-industrial past persisted into 1950s America and they were not solely the purview of Jim Crow racists harbouring nostalgia for the era of slavery; these notions permeated the cultural vanguard of the 1950s, too. Although these racial notions were no longer tied to the ideological project of acculturating whites to industrialisation, we can see that 'blackness' – or at least the version of the racial other conjured by the white imagination – was crucial to the innovative and influential artistic fields of the New York School abstract expressionists and the Beat generation writers. In both, we see a rebellious tendency to reject the aesthetic standards and materialist values of mainstream white middle class culture and explore new modes of expression that seek to pierce the superficiality of quotidian discourse. Yet, in both we also see inextricably chained to this implicit critique of mainstream society a romantic reverence for the racial other as the conduit for accessing the spontaneous primitive carnal drives of the id that promised to liberate the artist from the stultifying predictability and conformity of middle class whiteness.

Abstract expressionism's most famous practitioner, Jackson Pollock, for example, sought through his "Action Painting" method of dripping and flinging paint on a canvas to pierce the unconscious mind. Rejecting the representational forms that had dominated American painting since its inception, Pollock favoured mural-sized bursts of line, colour and texture. He called his style "direct painting," by which he meant creating the painting with least resistance or distortion from the conscious mind.[89] Inspired by his Jungian analyst to explore his unconscious mind and unlock the primitive totems therein,[90]

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[88] Ibid., p.118-9

[89] William Wright, "An Interview with Jackson Pollock" in Ellen H. Johnson (ed), American Artists on Art: From 1940-1980 (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), p.9

[90] Suzanne Seixas, "Birth of a Native Style," in H. W. Janson (ed.), American Painting 1900-1970 (New York: Time-Life International, 1973), p.140. Pollock was reportedly "resistant" to analysis but did confess to an interviewer shortly before he died: "I've been a Jungian for a long time." Selden Rodman, Conversations with Artists (New York: Capricorn Books, 1961), p.80-2

Pollock's stated intention was "working and expressing an inner world – in other words, expressing the energy, the motion and other inner forces."[91] Pollock's quest to circumvent his conscious mind and free his "inner forces" was inextricably tied to his coveting of the racial other. As he painted, he played black jazz records because he saw in jazz the pure, unbridled spontaneity he wished to emulate.[92] Defending his method of painting on the floor, he justified its artistic legitimacy by evoking the primitive culture of the exotic other: "this isn't unusual – the Orientals did that." He acknowledged that viewers were likely to "find references to American Indian art and calligraphy in parts of my pictures" because of his admiration for their art[93], and admitted a debt to Native Americans in his technique:

> On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since that way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be *in* the painting. This is akin to Indian sand painters of the West…. When I am *in* my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing.[94]

For Pollock, modernity and civilisation presented obstacles to creativity and pure art. Disdaining the symbols of modernity ("What a ridiculous idea: expressing the city – never did it in my life!"[95]) and favouring the semi-rural environment of Springs, Long Island to the hub of modernity, New York City, Pollock nevertheless perceived himself as a modern painter and an innovator: "It seems to me a modern painter cannot express this age, the airplane, the atom bomb, the radio, in the old forms of the Renaissance or of any other past culture. Each age finds its own techniques."[96] The paradox is then that Pollock's innovativeness and hence his credentials as a "modern" painter were based on his revulsion to modernity itself. To Pollock, modernity and civilisation, which infected

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[91] Wright in Johnson, p.6

[92] W. T. Lhamon, Jr., Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s (Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1990), p.173, 189

[93] Jackson Pollock, "Response to Questionnaire" in Ellen H. Johnson (ed), American Artists on Art: From 1940-1980 (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), p.2. Critics have commonly seen such links in works like "Blue Poles"

[94] Jackson Pollock, "My Painting," in Ellen H. Johnson (ed), American Artists on Art: From 1940-1980 (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), p.4

[95] Selden Rodman, p.84

[96] Wright, p.5

his conscious mind, contaminated artistic endeavour. For Pollock to make his "direct paintings" he strove to eliminate these traces of infection in his conscious mind and unleash the pure unconscious mind, whose primal totems are untarnished by modernity. There is a sense in Pollock's techniques of trying to resuscitate a creative vein that modernity and civilisation has clotted. In Pollock's explicit renunciation of the techniques of "old forms like the Renaissance and any other past culture" yet emulation of what he implicitly perceived as "pre-cultures" of racial others, there is a sense of nostalgia for what modernity and civilisation have left behind. Pollock's aim – to align his unconscious mind with his canvas, to be "in" the painting, to express his primal "inner forces" spontaneously and without conscious preconception – was inextricably linked to his admiration for the primitivism of the racial other – whether black jazz musician, "Oriental," or "Indian" – who was always already unencumbered by the constraints of the conscious mind, always already untarnished by modernity and civilisation.

Similar to Pollock's "direct painting," Beat writer Jack Kerouac's stream-of-consciousness spontaneous prose writing method, also known as "automatic writing" or "sketching,"[97] was an attempt to break free from the conventions of narrative form. Kerouac's biographer Ann Charters explains the method:

> For Jack, the appeal of sketching was his excitement letting himself go on paper, just as a jazz musician blew riff after riff of a solo following whatever direction his own mind and immediate emotions led him. As he told Allen [Ginsberg], when he sketched, he wrote "with 100% honesty," and sometimes was so inspired he lost consciousness.[98]

Benzedrine and marijuana aided Kerouac's "inspiration" to lose or at least alter consciousness to the point of accessing his unconscious, and achieving fluidity between mind and prose, which he felt was always stifled in his attempts at conventional storytelling.[99] Kerouac stated that the intention behind writing in a "semi-trance" was to

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[97] Ann Charters, "Introduction" to Jack Kerouac, On the Road (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p.xxv; Ann Charters, Kerouac (London: Pan Books, 1978), p.131

[98] Charters, Kerouac, p.131

[99] Ibid., p.90

could record "what conscious art would censor."[100] Concomitant to this breach of the barriers of the mind was a trenchant critique of the materialism of the white middle class world; in his 1958 novel The Dharma Bums, Kerouac lamented

> the general demand that [the middle class] consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming, all that crap they didn't really want anyway such as refrigerators, TV sets, cars, at least fancy new cars. Certain hair oils and deodorants and general junk you finally always see a week later in the garbage anyway, all of them imprisoned in a system of work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume.[101]

Kerouac revered the racial other for his (expressed always as a masculine fantasy) freedom from this materialist prison, and prized the culture of the racial other, especially black jazz, for its ability to liberate the white listener. In his major work On the Road, published in 1957, through alter-ego Sal Paradise, Kerouac follows his friend Dean Moriarty's (based on Kerouac's friend Neal Cassady) frenzied journeys across the American continent searching for "IT!" – the ecstatic transcendent beatific state that promised to free one from the banality of one's own (white) identity. When explaining "IT," Dean contrasts the hip, himself and Sal, from the square middle class couple who are giving them a ride. He tells Sal: "we know what IT is and we know TIME and we know everything is really FINE."[102] He explains that he and Sal have transcended the responsibilities and concomitant worries that afflict the middle class couple:

> Now, you just dig them in the front. They have worries, they're counting the miles, they're thinking about where they're going to sleep tonight, how much money for gas, the weather, how they'll get there – and all the time they'll get there anyway, you see. But they need to worry and betray time with urgencies false and otherwise, purely anxious and whiny, their souls really won't be at peace unless they can latch on to an established and proven worry and having once found it they assume facial expressions to fit and go with it, which is, you see, unhappiness, and all the time it flies by them and they know it and that *too* worries them no end.[103]

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[100] Quoted in David Savran, Taking it Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism and Contemporary American Culture (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), p.63

[101] Jack Kerouac, The Dharma Bums, (London: Penguin, 2000), p.77

[102] Kerouac, On the Road, p.208

[103] Ibid., p.208-9

Dean venerates those who, he believes, have and know "IT," who have, in other words, eschewed the anxious conformity that characterises the white middle class. For Dean, it is black jazzmen that induce "IT," a trance-like state of transcendence that liberates Dean's mind and body. When Dean and Sal see jazzman Slim Gaillard, "Dean stands in the back, saying, 'God! Yes!' – and clasping his hands in prayer and sweating. 'Sal, Slim knows time, he knows time.'"[104] Later, when they see a black saxophonist play, Dean is transported: "Dean was in a trance. The tenorman's eyes were fixed straight on him; he had a madman who not only understood but cared and wanted to understand more and much more than there was."[105] Describing the experience the next day, Dean attests: "Now, man, that alto man last night had IT – he held it once he found it; I've never seen a guy who could hold so long."[106] Here, the jazz of the racial other is the conduit for transporting Dean into the beatific state of "IT," for freeing him from the confines of whiteness that threaten to trap him in the "purely anxious and whiny" bourgeois white world.

Although not himself a Beat, Norman Mailer perceived similar limitations in hegemonic white society in his 1957 essay "The White Negro" and saw the white hipster as the postwar generation's justifiable response to the horrors of the Holocaust, the atomic bomb and corporate conformity. Echoing the Beat notion that modern white civilisation had severed part of one's being, Mailer posited that hip "would return us to ourselves" because it seeks to unleash primordial urges suppressed in modern society; hip "is the affirmation of the barbarian for it requires a primitive passion about human nature to believe that individual acts of violence are always preferred to the collective violence of the State."[107] Defining hip as "the sophistication of the wise primitive in a giant jungle," Mailer reasoned that "its appeal is still beyond the civilized man."[108] Mailer

[104] Ibid., p.176

[105] Ibid., p.198

[106] Ibid., p.206

[107] Norman Mailer, Advertisements for Myself (New York: G. P. Putnam/Berkley Windhover, 1976), p.316

[108] Ibid., p.305

argued that it was logical that the white hipster took as his model "the Negro," because "the Negro" had always been "free" from the enervating conformity of white civilisation:

> The cameos of security for the average white: mother, home, job and the family, are not even a mockery to millions of Negroes; they are impossible. The Negro has the simplest of alternatives: live a life of constant humility or ever-threatening danger. In such a pass where paranoia is as vital to survival as blood, the Negro had stayed alive and begun to grow by following the need of his body where he could. Knowing in the cells of his existence that life was war, nothing but war, the Negro (all exceptions admitted) could rarely afford the sophisticated inhibitions of civilization, and so he kept for his survival the art of the primitive, he lived in the enormous present, he subsisted for Saturday night kicks, relinquishing the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body, and in his music he gave voice to the character and quality of his existence, to his rage and the infinite variations of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pinch, scream and despair of his orgasm. For jazz is orgasm, good orgasm and bad, and so it spoke across a nation….[109]

In Mailer's formulation, it is "the Negro's" very alienation from white civilisation – and its inhibiting and numbing "securities" of "mother, home, job and the family" – that nourishes and preserves "his" vibrancy. Under the constant threat of racial violence and without the "sophisticated inhibitions of civilization" or the rational inhibitions of the "pleasures of the mind," "the Negro" is able to live in a primitive state of perpetual present, living for the "obligatory pleasures of the body" that are expressed in the "joy, lust, languor, growl, pinch, scream and despair of his orgasm." As such, "the Negro" proves the perfect model for the white hipster who has abandoned white civility in favour of pursuing "an orgasm more apocalyptic than the one preceding it."[110]

In discussing the racial politics of the Beat generation David Savran argues that the "cross-race identification" that is a constant motif in the work of the Beat writers and poets and the non-Beat Mailer is "a symptom of a melancholic process whereby the subject attempts to incorporate that which he has lost."[111] This "melancholia," as Savran diagnoses it, is inextricably linked to the subject's perceived limitations of his own whiteness. As Eric Lott explains, in "rationalized Western societies, becoming 'white' and male seems to depend on a remanding of enjoyment, the body, an aptitude for

[109] Ibid., p.302-3

[110] Ibid., p.309

[111] Savran, p.62

pleasure. It is the other who is always putatively 'excessive' in this respect, whether through exotic food, strange and noisy music, outlandish bodily exhibitions, or unremitting sexual appetite." In projecting the pleasures one has forsaken to become white and male onto the other, "the dispossessed become bearers of the dominant classes' 'folk' culture, its repository of joy and revivification."[112] Savran explains how the melancholic white male subject's projection of his 'lost' traits onto the other translates into a desire for, and even to be, the dispossessed other:

> Unable to face the loss of joy, of a sense of belonging – and unconscious of the fact he has even lost them – the 'disillusioned' and melancholic white male subject attempts to be black himself. This act of impersonation represents a fantasmatic recovery of that which he has lost, of that otherness which he so desperately desires, and which is instantiated as a sense of community, ecstasy, the body, sensuality, sexuality, the primitive, the authentic….[113]

Nowhere is this desire to abdicate one's white identity and inhabit a black one more explicitly stated than in Kerouac's On the Road. In a widely-discussed sequence[114] that has Kerouac's protagonist and alter-ego Sal Paradise wandering the streets of Denver, the sense of melancholia becomes especially overt:

> At lilac evening I walked with every muscle aching among the lights… of the Denver colored section, wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night…. I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a "white man" disillusioned…. I was only myself, Sal Paradise, sad, strolling in this violet dark, this unbearably sweet night, wishing I could exchange worlds with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America.[115]

In this passage, Sal projects all that he believes he has 'lost' to ascend to his hegemonic whiteness onto the "happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America," who are the bearers of "life, joy, kicks, darkness, music… night." Sal's physical proximity to the other (he passes "dark porches of Mexican and Negro homes; soft voices were there,

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[112] Lott, p.482

[113] Savran, p.62

[114] See, for example, Savran, p.61; Lhamon, p.70, Gubar, p.184-5; Andrew Ross, No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture (New York: Routledge, 1989), p.68-9

[115] Kerouac, On the Road, p.180

occasionally the dusky knee of some mysterious sensual gal"[116]) only magnifies his distance and isolation from the 'lost' world of pleasure that he covets. Yet, for all that Sal desires and yearns to "exchange worlds" with the other, there is the implicit acknowledgement of the necessity of segregation; the other can house such carnal pleasures precisely because the other is alienated and prohibited from the white world. As sociologist Ned Polsky concluded from his 1960 study of the Greenwich Village scene, most white Beats "accept the Negro only for his 'Negro-ness' (as bringer of marihuana and jazz, etc.) and thus practice an inverted form of 'keeping the nigger in his place'."[117] All the better for the other, though, according to Kerouac, for at least they would be insulated from the pressures and indignities of the white world of civilisation and responsibility: "There was excitement and the air was filled with the vibration of really joyous life that knows nothing of disappointment and 'white sorrows' and all that."[118] As Norman Podhoretz put it in his 1958 critique of Kerouac and Ginsberg, "I doubt if a more idyllic picture of Negro life has been painted since certain Southern ideologues tried to convince the world that things were just fine as fine could be for the slaves on the old plantation."[119]

To evoke racist stereotypes that endorsed slavery was almost certainly not the intention of Kerouac, Pollock or Mailer, but the ecstasy of imagining oneself as black was surely a commentary on the intellectual vanguards' attitudes towards whiteness. In relation to the perceived boredom, materialism and emptiness of their own whiteness, or, more precisely, the white middle class world into which they were born, the imagined world of the other held incalculably more freedom, hope and joy. That the racial other and 'his' world should be imagined so idyllically is surely indicative of the trenchant critique the intellectual vanguard was making of the middle class world and hegemonic expectations surrounding whiteness. But, as James Baldwin lamented, this critique cast the "American Negro male" as "a kind of walking phallic symbol; which means that one

[116] Ibid.

[117] Quoted in Savran, p.52

[118] Kerouac, On the Road, p.181

[119] Quoted in Ross, p.69

pays, in one's own personality, for the sexual insecurity of others."[120] Despite their professed love for – and, at times, avowed fraternity with – blackness, the intellectual vanguard relied on segregation, not integration; they needed to preserve the boundary between white and black culture that kept the exotic racial other vital. As Elvis Presley's emulation of black culture shows, fantasies of race-crossing explored through popular culture also relied on the separation of black culture to provide an exotic conduit trough which to explore radical alternatives to the hegemonic white world.

Presley and White Melancholia

In many ways, Elvis Presley had a very different relationship with hegemonic whiteness, and also the racial other, than the likes of Kerouac, Mailer and Pollock. As I have mentioned previously, suburban whites, urban blacks and white hipsters alike considered poor southern whites like Presley vulgar, contemptible figures. Poor southern whites were not expected to become, or even aspire to be, men in grey flannel suits. Unlike Kerouac or Pollock, the hegemonic ideal for a poor white southerner like Presley was not a chilling prospect from which to escape but a crushing reminder of one's limited social horizons. Growing up in racially mixed poor neighbourhoods and sharing a sense of limited social horizons with his black neighbours, Presley's youthful experiences were far more similar to his black neighbours than the college-educated intellectual vanguard.

Another difference was that Presley gravitated toward a different ideal of blackness. The Beats prized the perceived asceticism of black jazzmen and street hipsters. To the Beats, black culture's ostracism from the materialism of white consumer and corporate culture kept it pure and uncontaminated. Many middle class Beats effectively dropped out of the comfortable lifestyles in which they were raised to pursue what they perceived as the nobility of poverty that was embodied in poor black people. While the Beats copied the slightly dishevelled styles of be-bop artists like Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonius Monk or affected the understated black turtleneck sweater, Presley sought out the flashy fashions of rhythm and blues stars like Lloyd Price and Wynonnie Harris, who favoured expensive and extravagant clothes, jewellery and cars that demonstrated their

[120] Quoted in Robert Corber, In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia, and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p.170

wealth and success. Having grown up poor, Presley saw neither nobility in poverty, nor any reason to flaunt his poverty, but was forced to buy flashy second-hand clothes on instalment plans before he became famous.[121] As Jackie Wilson commented: "I guess any guy who has been poor once is like me. He likes good clothes."[122] Presley concurred: "I can never forget the longing to be someone. I guess if you are poor you always think bigger and want more than those who have everything when they are born."[123]

For Presley, black rhythm and blues stars provided models for alternative means of success that deviated from hegemonic norms and traditional working class occupations. He explained his desire to pursue singing as a way to avoid the underpaid and laborious work available to someone of his educational and economic background: "I wanted to be a singer because I didn't want to sweat. Had a job driving a truck when I got out of high school. After that I got a job at a dollar an hour in a defense plant. About a year and a half ago when I first started singing I figured it'd be easy."[124]

Presley also admired other rebellious figures that exuded an edgy masculinity. Southern truck drivers, for instance, inspired him to grow long sideburns: "They looked daring to me. I daydreamed of being a real wild truck driver."[125] In 1956, the Memphis State College linked Presley's desire for alternative masculine role models to his social and economic status: "While he and friends played out in streets and stood on corners, the big shining, rich world rolled by in big, shiny, rich cars. All right, he wasn't big and he wasn't rich, but by gosh he could grow sideburns if he wanted to."[126] Presley was also inspired by young film stars that evoked versions of masculinity that rebelled against hegemonic norms, and he clearly wished to emulate what he perceived as the thrilling and virile attractions of this alternative masculinity: "I've made a study of Marlon Brando. I've made a study of poor Jimmy Dean. I've made a study of myself, and I know why

[121] Bertrand, p.207

[122] Ibid., p.119

[123] Ibid., p.197

[124] Ibid., p.121

[125] Ibid., p.207

[126] Ibid., p.207

girls, at least the young 'uns, go for us. We're sullen, we're brooding, we're something of a menace. I don't understand it exactly, but that's what the girls like in men."[127] Hence Presley's race-crossing desires were inseparable from his general attraction to masculinities that he perceived as rebelling against and transgressing hegemonic masculinity.

Despite their differences, both the intellectual vanguard and Presley seemed drawn by similar sets of racial ideologies. That is, as with the intellectual vanguard, Presley felt a sense of lack in his cultural identity that blackness seemed to fill out. As a poor southern white alienated from the hegemonic consensus, an effective 'nobody' in postwar society, Presley felt like he needed to transcend his origins to become 'somebody'. As he told an interviewer in 1965: "I always wanted to be somebody, and feel like somebody, but I never expected to be anybody important."[128] In black culture, Presley sensed a fullness that was absent from his own identity. Presley claimed he was able to incorporate black culture into his style. As he explained the origins of rock n roll:

> The colored folks been singing it and playing it just like I'm doing now, man, for more years than I know. They played it like that in their shanties and in their juke joints and nobody paid it no mind til I goosed it up. I got it from them. Down in Tupelo, Mississippi, I used to hear old Arthur Crudup bang his box the way I do now and I said if I ever got to the place I could feel all old Arthur felt, I'd be a music man like nobody ever saw.[129]

Presley's desire to "feel all old Arthur felt" parallels Sal Paradise's yearning to inhabit the racial other, and although he has "goosed it up," he "bangs his box" the way Crudup used to; his emulation has enabled him to "be a music man like nobody ever saw." Black singers besides Crudup provided direct inspiration for Presley; he told a radio disc jockey in 1957 that he aspired to sound like rhythm and blues singers Otis Blackwell and Lloyd Price on his records.[130] Yet, even though Presley is self-consciously imitating black

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[127] Guralnick, Last Train, 323-4

[128] Bertrand, p.97

[129] Ibid., p.103

[130] Ibid., p.211

culture, he claims that "I sing the way I do because it comes natural to me."[131] In defence of his on-stage dancing, he said that his leg "just automatically wiggles like that" and that when "I sing this rock and roll, my eyes won't stay open and my legs won't stand still."[132] In other words, Presley claims that he has imbibed black culture to the extent that his style flows from him "naturally," not as a prefabricated mimic of bluesmen like Crudup but a genuinely self-possessed "music man." Here, 'blackness', as an entity able to be appropriated, is crucial to Presley's performance. Invoking the racial other through his black-styled garb, his rhythm and blues songs and his imitation of black vocalists, he is able, on-stage, to release himself and unleash the frenzied and sexualised body movements he kept restrained in polite white society.

Moreover, like Sal Paradise, whose wish to inhabit the body of the racial other is ultimately unfulfilled and self-defeating – "I was only myself, Sal Paradise, sad, strolling in this violet dark" – Presley noted a profound distance between himself and the black artists that he felt were the real practitioners of the musical style he wished to emulate. As he told an interviewer in 1957: "A lot of people seem to think I started this business, but rock and roll was here a long time before I came along. Nobody can sing that kind of music like colored people. Let's face it, I can't sing like Fats Domino can. I know that. But I always liked that kind of music."[133] When discussing black rhythm and blues vocalist Clyde McPhatter, Presley once told Sam Phillips: "You know, if I had a voice like that man, I'd never want for another thing."[134] Presley described Jackie Wilson's Las Vegas performance of one of Presley's songs in self-derogatory terms: "He was trying so hard until he got much better, boy, much better than that record of mine. He was real slender, he was a colored guy, he did it much slower than me…. He was hittin' it, boy. He grabbed that microphone and went down to the last note, went all the way down to the floor, man, looking straight up at the ceiling. Man, he was cuttin' it out. I was

[131] Ibid., p.205

[132] Guralnick, p.187, 289

[133] Bertrand, p.199

[134] Ibid., p.211

under the table when he got through singing."[135] Although Presley claims that he has imbibed black culture to the extent that his imitations of black performers are "natural" expressions – that he "naturally" evokes 'blackness' – there is a sense in his own accounts of black performers that he does not compare favourably, that he does not, finally, measure up.

There is another sense in which Presley felt he did not 'measure up' to the black performers he aspired to. Presley was long rumoured to have worn a prosthetic phallus in his pants, possibly a lead pipe. A boyhood friend of Presley's confirmed that Presley used penile enhancements as early as 1955:

> He would take the cardboard cylinder out of a roll of toilet paper and put a string in one end of it. Then, he'd tie that string around his waist. The other end, with the cardboard roller, would hang down outside his drawers, so as when he got onstage and reared back with that guitar in his hand, it would look to the girls up front like he had one helluva thing there inside his pants.[136]

Presley's prosthetic phallus was part of his "black persona," likely inspired by mythologies that black men have large penises. In this application of a prosthetic, Presley demonstrates his desire to emulate the hyper-masculinity that is supposedly endemic to black males, and his awareness of white females' fascinated and excited reactions to it. Yet, it also shows that Presley's attempts to inhabit blackness are ultimately self-defeating. As Marjorie Garber points out, Presley's use of a prosthetic qualify him as "a female impersonator, for only a female would lack the phallus and need a substitute." Moreover, on Presley's nickname, she says: "'The Pelvis' – an anatomical region which seems at first specific, but is in fact both remarkably vague and distinctly ungendered – became the site of speculation and spectatorship."[137]

As I discussed in a previous chapter, paradoxically rebel youths' attempts to construct and project alternative masculinities, even when aspiring to embody the perceived hyper-masculinity of black males, often resulted in androgynous identities, or at least identities that did not neatly fit into traditional definitions of masculinity. In

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[135] Ibid., p.122

[136] Marjorie Garber, Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety (New York: Routledge, 1992), p.366

[137] Ibid., p.366-7

Presley's case, not only his prosthetics but also his make-up produced a sense of gender ambiguity or confusion in the 1950s. Chet Atkins remembers the shock and anxiety that Presley engendered at the conservative bastion of southern country music, the Grand Ole Opry, when he performed there wearing eye shadow: "I couldn't get over that eye shadow he was wearing. It was like seeing a couple of guys kissing in Key West."[138] The Beats aroused similar anxieties because of their appearance. Beat critic Leslie Fiedler, for example, complained that the Beats' long hair, "high heels" and "jeans tight over the buttocks" turned them away "from masculine aggression to feminine allure," making them "into the non- or anti-male."[139] That white males' attempts to embody blackness produces gender ambiguity is possibly attributable to the self-defeating nature of the attempted embodiment; perhaps to abdicate white masculinity yet fail to inhabit black masculinity convincingly mires one in a literal "no man's land." But this ambiguity is also indicative of the liminal gender position of black masculinity itself that is in a sense considered 'excessively masculine' in genital attributes yet does not enjoy the social endowments accorded to white masculinity. Furthermore, the gender ambiguity produced out of the youth culture's attempted articulation of alternative masculinity also mirrors the imperilled state of white hegemonic masculinity in the 1950s that, although it was the normative state of masculinity, was also compromised by doubts about effeminacy and castration.

[138] Ibid., p.367. Atkins might also have been shocked also at the sight of Southern men from elite society donning make-up and female attire for 'womanless weddings'. Daniel argues that conservative Southern white males ritualised gender transgressions in environments where meaning could be 'contained' in order to reinforce social hierarchy. For fundraising and charity occasions, for instance, Southern white men would perform "folk plays" of "womanless weddings" where men would dress up as women and "marry" other men. "Minstrel shows" and "beauty contests" would also be staged whereby white men would apply blackface (to play blacks) and wear dresses (to play women), often both at once (to play black women). The latent threat inherent to the symbolic association of white 'women' with 'black' men was relieved by the symbolic mastery of white men over both blacks and women in these plays. While some blacks were allowed to perform in "Womanless Weddings" and minstrel shows, in the context of the inherent racism of these otherwise white-only events their light-hearted entertainment posed no threat to "white institutions or propriety, and in many white minds confirmed black depravity." Unlike Presley's gender transgressions, these Southern white men's dalliances with feminine attire was contained by their patriarchal dominance of the occasion; rather than offering radical new modes of conceiving gender, Southern white men's appropriation of feminine characteristics worked more to underscore their dominance over the field of gender representation. Daniel, Lost Revolutions, p.158

[139] Quoted in Savran, p.66

Although ultimately self-defeating, the attempts by Presley, the Beats and the like to inhabit black masculinity nonetheless articulated a trenchant critique of hegemonic white culture. These celebrations of black culture yearned for both a more virile masculinity than that of the 'castrated' man in the grey flannel suit, and for a more free and spontaneous disposition than that possible in the conformity engendered by corporatism. The youth culture also turned to black culture, either through black rhythm and blues performers or white performers imitating blackness, to exercise their cultural autonomy. By appropriating black culture, which was a part of American society excluded from representations of national consensus, the youth culture exposed the mythologies underpinning the containment narrative, but in the process also romanticised the racial other in ways antithetical to integration.

The Rock n Roll Audience

While it is problematic to generalise about what motivates the consumption habits of disparate individuals within a particular socially constructed group, like the youth culture of the 1950s, we can assume that when such a group gravitates en masse towards a certain cultural form like rhythm and blues that it articulates something about their collective identity. In other words, the choices of a significant proportion of the 1950s youth culture to consume rhythm and blues music over other types of music reveals much about their ideals, aspirations and self-image. In the context of a burgeoning sense of an autonomous youth identity distinct from the ideals and aspirations of their parents' generation in the 1950s, a sense which was expressed primarily through collective consumption habits, youths perceived in rhythm and blues the autonomy and distinctiveness they desired.

George Lipsitz argues that the banality of the adult world motivated middle class white youths to adopt rhythm and blues:

> The first generation of young people with money to spend without necessarily having to work, [middle class white teenagers] rejected the values of their parents to seek out cultural alternatives…. In part, they simply sought to escape from the stifling blandness of popular music, but they also developed their preferences as people living in an increasingly bureaucratic and conformist society. In a society that lauded the "organization man" and recommended obedience even to

> incompetent authority they sought autonomy, emotion, and authentic human feeling as found in working class cultures.[140]

Lipsitz shrewdly deduces the renunciation of hegemonic middle class American values implicit in youths' adoption of rhythm and blues. Yet he does not recognise that it was the marginalisation of rhythm and blues from mainstream white culture – in that this very segregation enabled the music to express blacks' "autonomy, emotion and authentic human feeling" and made it exotically 'other' to white mainstream culture – that provided the basis for white youths' appropriation and eventual transformation of the music.

Lipsitz also accounts for white youths' patronage of rock n roll by arguing that rock n roll obliquely articulated a folk protest against the dehumanising effects of industrial capitalism, a protest in which white teenagers and blacks were both invested:

> Originating in pre-industrial societies, oral cultures carry an implicit critique of industrial organization. They stress group solidarity instead of the self-regulating individual, value immediate emotional experience more than deferred gratification in pursuit of a distant goal, and assert the primacy of everyday life over abstract ideas. Under industrial conditions, an oral tradition serves as collective memory of better times as well as a means of making the present more bearable. Country music and blues bequeathed the concerns of their respective oral traditions to rock and roll, and it carried their subversive message throughout society. [141]

Further, Lipsitz suggests that rock n roll articulated intentions "more consistent with the immediate emotional needs of working class life than with the socially-approved rational planning for the future encouraged by the middle-class world of literacy and deferred gratification."[142] In this sense, rock n roll worked to carve "away a limited sphere of autonomy in an increasingly regimented world."[143] This was the basis for the music's appeal and cultural relevance for the nascent youth culture.

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[140] Lipsitz, "Against the Wind," p.274

[141] Lipsitz, Class and Culture, p.218

[142] Ibid., p.219

[143] Ibid.

However, Lipsitz's vision of rock n roll fomenting a pan-racial, cross-class alliance attuned to a working class critique of industrial capitalism informed by pre-industrial oral culture cuts against the grain of America's history of racial exploitation overwhelming working class solidarity. As American labour history (including Lipsitz's own work[144]) shows, race most often trumps class. Generally, working whites have exploited their 'wages of whiteness' to cash in on the only cultural capital available to them to secure the privileges denied to blacks. One can therefore question Lipsitz's view that rock n roll reversed this history of race trumping class and ushered in a shared sense of class solidarity. This was particularly unlikely during an era of increasing division of labour along racial lines and the erosion of 'working class identity' as a politically meaningful term under the assault of the Red Scare.

Rather, the youth culture's main interest in rock n roll was as a cultural space for the expression of an autonomous youth identity that was distinct from the tastes and mores of adult culture. The racial politics of both rock n roll and the youth culture were at best ambiguous. Black culture was desirable in that it represented profound difference from adult culture, and white youths' contact with it discomfited parents and adult authorities. This helped define the contours of the generation gap and showed the youth culture's power to upset adult culture. As Sam Phillips said, the outrage that rock n roll provoked in adults was vital to the music's success with youths: "without the cooperation of total resentment on the part of the parents, rock n roll would have had a rougher time making it."[145] Yet black culture was valued predominantly for its distance, its otherness, the level of revulsion it provoked in conservative whites, and in this way was frequently viewed through the prism of historically entrenched stereotypes of blackness that emanated from the white imagination.

In his hyperbolic essay "Convalescence" Eldridge Cleaver connects these stereotypes to the rise of rock n roll and the civil rights movement. He argues that segregation forced a separation of "the Mind from the Body – the oppressor whites usurping sovereignty by monopolizing the Mind, abdicating the Body and becoming

[144] See, for example, George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness," American Quarterly 47 (1995): 369-87

[145] Daniel, "Rhythm of the Land," p.10

bodiless Omnipotent Administrators and Ultrafeminines; and the oppressed blacks, divested of sovereignty and therefore of Mind, manifesting the Body and becoming mindless Supermasculine Menials and Black Amazons." He suggests that through rock n roll whites sought to reconnect the Body to the Mind.[146] In terms of racial ideologies, there is something to this argument; that by consorting with black culture whites sought to access pleasures and emotions from which white civilisation has been estranged that are thought to be residing in blackness. Indeed, we have seen something of this cultural dynamic in the Beats' attitudes toward blackness. Historian Michael Ochs advocates precisely these kinds of ideologies that cast blackness as nothing more than a conduit through which whites can connect with what they have supposedly lost: "I didn't believe when everybody attacked [rock n roll] saying that the purpose of rock n roll was to lower the white man to the level with the Negro, but it turned out it was true. It did, I think, raise us to the level of the Negro; it raised us into being more emotional, more honest, being in touch with our feelings." [147]

The race-crossing fantasies and romances that cast blackness as the repository for the pre-industrial id must be viewed in the context of the broadening category of 'whiteness' at the expense of other ethnic identities during the 1950s. The advent of the suburbs meant the severance of old urban community ties and, with these, important links to ethnic identities. Whiteness seemed simultaneously to achieve ubiquity yet become invisible, absorb all ethnic differences yet signify nothing in particular, to be full yet also lacking. As the homogenous norm, whiteness seemed beyond race, beyond ethnicity, beyond anything specific, tangible or identifiable. Desiring to 'become black', even to experience 'blackness' in the most temporary and cursory fashion, was at least to become *something*, and escape the void of whiteness. This attests, though, to the mastery and transcendentiality of whiteness. It demonstrates the power of whiteness to define, inhabit and reproduce its version of blackness and disseminate it so pervasively that even blacks are saturated with whites' representations of blackness.

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[146] Eldridge Cleaver, Soul on Ice (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), p.191-2

[147] Quoted in documentary series The History of Rock n' Roll. Episode Two, "Good Rockin' Tonight." Dir. Bud Friedgen. Time-Life DVD, 2004.

The desire among white youth to inhabit blackness was in part fuelled by the 1950s crisis of masculinity. Fevered prognoses of the emasculated conformist corporate (white) 'man' licensed probes into the man in the grey flannel suit's phallic entitlement. The crisis tarnishing the era's hegemonic masculinity concerned the perception that the economic boom facilitating universal entry into the middle class was inadvertently effeminising men through its demand for mundane, routinised and robotic corporate occupations. Ironically, the very basis of America's strength in fighting the Cold War, as many conceived the capitalist economy to be (along with its attendant suburban lifestyle), was believed to erode men's abilities to defeat the Soviet Union and render them susceptible to Communist seduction.

The 1950s crisis of masculinity was the burden solely of white middle class males, the only victims of both corporate employment and suburban living. Blacks, rendered invisible in representations of the nation, and working class whites, effaced in exultations of a universal 'middle class', avoided scrutiny of their masculine potency. As we saw earlier, activities traditionally associated with working class masculinity were prescribed as means of re-erecting the corporate man's diminished sense of himself. No wonder, then, in the context of hyper-masculine stereotypes surrounding black masculinity, that white male youths sought to inhabit blackness to repudiate hegemonic expectations of white masculinity. As I have indicated, though, this will towards inhabitation is inevitably the product of whites' imaginary projection of their sense of lack onto blackness. Mired in a phallic economy that conflated male genitalia with the right to social governance, their hereditary hegemonic subjectivity haunted by anxieties about emasculation, impotence and castration, white male youths were drawn to myths of black masculine virility, carnal pleasure and pre-industrial joy, which they found played out in rock n roll music.

White suburban females were often similarly attracted to figures of 'otherness' that defied hegemonic norms. Norms surrounding femininity were particularly restrictive during the postwar period's resuscitation of Victorian values. Women were not expected to pursue careers in anything but housewifery and motherhood, and were dissuaded from higher education. Sociologist Paul Goodman underscored the dominant ideology of the 1950s when he wrote that a girl "is not expected to make something of herself. Her career

does not have to be self-justifying, for she will have children, which is absolutely self-justifying, like any other natural or creative act."[148] A teenage girl's negotiation of the sexual puzzles of adolescence determined her courtship capital and the highest currency was sexual virtue; should a girl become 'cheap' by losing her virginity before marriage, her chances of marrying a successful man – the only avenue she could be judged 'successful' herself – diminished markedly. Middle class girls who were dissatisfied with their limited educational and occupational horizons and their forced sexual repression, but realised the social necessity of conforming to these norms, often utilised the safe fantasy space of fan culture to imagine alternatives. Lacking rebellious female popular culture figures to emulate, many girls, as Wini Breines puts it, "had little choice but to utilize and adapt male versions of rebellion and disaffection." Thus, girls would idolise males "who were inappropriate as boyfriends and potential mates and who represented an alternative to their bland teenage world."[149]

Nineteen-fifties girls' "bland teenage world" was riddled with conflicting messages and confusing ambiguities about sexuality. Popular culture celebrated figures of female sexuality and feminine allure, like the era's emblematic sex symbol Marilyn Monroe. Female fashion norms emphasised femininity and exaggerated features of the female body like "hourglass shapes of large breasts, small waists compressed by cinch belts, skirts made huge by enormous crinolines, and high-heeled and pointed-toe shoes."[150] The culture's obsession with large breasts inflected, for instance, the design of toasters and Cadillac fenders, and led to 4.5 million "falsies" (or chest-enhancing prosthetics) being sold in 1948 alone.[151] Yet, in advice manuals, journals and girls' magazines, the demonisation of the 'bad girl', whose sexual activity outside of marriage and utilisation of her celebrated sexual allure is portrayed as dangerous, threatening and ultimately disastrous, worked to warn girls against exercising their sexuality. Life

[148] Wini Breines, Young, White and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties, p.128

[149] Ibid., p.130

[150] Ibid., p.99

[151] Ibid.; Beth Bailey, From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America (Baltimore, MY: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p.73

magazine's resident sociologist summed up the feminine predicament of the 1950s: "It seems that half the time of our adolescent girls is spent trying to meet their new responsibilities to be sexy, glamorous, and attractive, while the other half is spent meeting their old responsibility to be virtuous by holding off the advances that testify to their success."[152]

However undesirably the media portrayed the bad girl's deeds, her unleashed sexual appetites also contained an element of fascination for sexually repressed girls struggling to retain their virtue under the duress of the courtship ritual. As psychologists Elizabeth Douvan and Joseph Adelson put it, in "real life the American girl may want to be bad but must at all costs give the appearance of being good."[153] Punishments attended girls who could not harness their carnal urges. Advice columnists commonly championed the necessity of retaining the appearance of 'worth', or high value in courtship capital, in the eyes of boys. Typical of this, one columnist responded to the question "Should I let him kiss me on the first date?" by eschewing any notion of a girl's desires and focusing the question on the boy's perception of virtue and worth: "if a boy 'gets' his kiss on the first date, he may assume that many other boys have been just as easily compensated. In other words, the rule book advises mainly that the [girl's] popularity assets should be protected against deflation."[154] Here, not only is courtship "construed and understood in models and metaphors of modern industrial capitalism," as Beth Bailey argues it commonly was in the 1950s[155], it also reinforces patriarchal dominance over the girl's assets; not only can her date cause the girl's assets to depreciate, but "his kiss" is his dividend (along with, presumably, other sexual reimbursements to follow) from his investment in the courtship ritual.

In the postwar period the practice of 'going steady', which replaced the promiscuous dating rituals that dominated pre-war courtship, was designed to protect the

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[152] Breines, p.87

[153] Ibid., p.125

[154] Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess, Gloria Jacobs, "Beatlemania: Girls Just Want to Have Fun" in Lisa A. Lewis (ed), The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media (London: Routledge, 1992), p.94

[155] Bailey, p.5

girl's value.[156] Going steady was to an extent an emulation of marriage, where a boy and girl dated exclusively in a bond that was often conspicuously demarcated by the exchange of tokens or rings.[157] Under this system, the girl had to keep the boy sexually interested without 'cheapening' herself by getting a "reputation" that she actually engaged in and enjoyed sex. Stages of intimacy in a relationship were demarcated by an escalating set of sexual activities that were not 'officially' deemed to be sex, from 'necking' (kissing that only involved contact from the neck up) to 'petting' (groping and caressing of fully-clothed bodies) to 'touching' (bare skin) to oral sex (even to orgasm) that kept girls "technical virgins."[158] Margaret Mead pointed to the dangers of stepping outside of these boundaries: "The first rule of petting is the need for complete control of just how far the physical behaviour is to go; one sweeping impulse, one acted out desire for complete possession or complete surrender, and the game is lost…. The boy is expected to ask for as much as possible, the girl to yield as little as possible."[159]

Although girls were, in a limited sense, in control of sexual activity because they had the most to lose by tarnishing their reputations and were blamed for transgressions, by no means were they 'free' to explore their own sexuality. Rather, they were compelled to protect their sexual virtue to retain their worth in the patriarchal economy of courtship, suppressing their own sexual desires while simultaneously arousing and refusing men's. The end goal of these emotional acrobatics was to find a 'good' (generally meaning upwardly mobile) husband to whom to be a subordinate housewife and bear children. This goal greatly affected girls' future expectations. A study conducted by psychologists Douvan and Adelston in 1955-6, for example, found that girls focused more on adolescent courtship than on future work prospects. Surveying 2,005 girls from eleven to eighteen years of age and 1,045 boys aged from fourteen to eighteen, they found that girls were far less precise in their future plans than boys. Girls generally had fewer coherent plans of their occupational futures and most eschewed careers and jobs that required high

[156] Ibid., p.26

[157] Ibid., p.50

[158] Breines, p.118

[159] Ibid., p.120

levels of commitment and training, expecting instead to rely on their future husbands to provide for them.[160]

In the context of young females' sexual repression and limited future expectations, adulation for rebellious male popular culture figures offered females the chance to imagine alternatives to the rigours of the courtship ritual and experience sexual freedom and autonomy, albeit in the temporary and fantastical cultural space of fandom. As Angela McRobbie and others have argued, girlfans forged important homosocial links around the 'bedroom culture' of fandom. While the ostensible link binding this culture together was the male rock n roller or actor who was the source of communal adoration, girlfans were not merely engaged in passive adoration of the male star. Rather, more important were the cultural interactions occurring between girlfans who used the male star as a conduit to explore their own sexual feelings and to express in the safe space of the bedroom a degree of sexual autonomy and desire that had to be repressed in the wider culture.[161] In similar ways, the rock n roll concert became a cultural space that allowed wild expression of pent up urges in the form of hysterical screaming, shouting, dancing, ripping the clothes of rock n roll performers, pulling of hair and wetting oneself. As Breines argues, being a rock n roll fan "implied the rejection, if fleeting, of middle-class expectations regarding appropriate boyfriends and the neat progression of courtship from dating, going steady, to getting married. It permitted irrationality and hysteria."[162]

The choice of male star to be adulated was also significant in this fleeting rejection of middle class expectations. Common targets of adulation tended to be alienated, androgynous and 'dark' figures like James Dean, Elvis Presley and the Beats who contrasted markedly with the hegemonic version of masculinity. Each figure to various degrees rejected middle class conventions and etiquette, and in this way could be imagined in exciting romantic alternatives to the repressive and stifling courtship rituals of the 1950s. Moreover, each to an extent evoked a transgressive connection with black

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[160] Ibid., p.106-7

[161] This discussion is informed by Patricia Juliana Smith, "'Ask Any Girl': Compulsory Heterosexuality and Girl Group Culture" in Kevin Dettmar and William Richey (eds), Reading Rock n Roll: Authenticity, Appropriation, Aesthetics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999)

[162] Breines, p.157

culture that repudiated hegemonic white masculinity's insulation from cultures of the 'other'. Presley, as we have seen, was a white working class southerner who evoked black culture and sexuality in his music, and who combed his hair in ways that linked him to dangerous juvenile delinquents. As Ehrenreich et al described Presley, he was "a hood who had no place in the calculus of dating, going steady and getting married."[163] In other words, to be a fan of Presley was also, potentially, to engage in fantasies of sexual encounters that were not restricted by rigid courtship rituals. Part of his appeal "was that you would never marry him; the romance would never end in the tedium of marriage."[164] Moreover, being an Elvis fan was likely to upset parents and emphasise the autonomy of the youth culture. By combining southern whiteness with black sexuality, Presley symbolised interracial cultural relations that Jim Crow laws in the South and informal segregation in the North worked, and ultimately failed, to prohibit, and raised the spectre of miscegenation that parents throughout America so feared.

In addition to offering liberating fantasies, adulation of Presley also enabled female fans to upset gender norms in ways that afforded a modicum of sexual autonomy to females. According to David Shumway, Presley was

> the first male star to display his body as an overt sexual object. While most male movie stars have doubtless been portrayed as sexually desirable, their bodies have not been the locus of the attraction.... In calling attention to himself as sexual – that is, in presenting himself as an object of sexual inticement or excitation – he violated not just conventional morality but more importantly the taboo against male sexual display. In violating this taboo, Elvis became, like most women but unlike most men, sexualised.[165]

By objectifying Presley, young females, always the 'looked at' in patriarchal culture, could exercise sexual autonomy by turning a man into the object of their gaze. Moreover, Presley's androgynous appearance blurred categories of gender that had appeared so rigid during the 1950s. His use of make-up, principally eye shadow, his long coiffed hair and his unusual stage persona that combined the traits of phallic rock star and tender crooner, contributed to a widening definition of masculinity that suggested that gender categories

[163] Ehrenreich et al p.101

[164] Ibid., p.96

[165] Quoted in Rodman, p.67

were not fixed and were subject to change.[166] This was a heartening prospect for young girls who found the dictates of femininity restrictive and limiting.

However liberating the fan space was as an escape for young females it was, nonetheless, a temporary fantasy space that did not necessarily effect tangible changes in gender relations as these young women progressed toward adulthood. As William Schlamm of the National Review put it: "So what if Elvis Presley 'sends' a few million adolescent girls? Soon, they'll marry, have children, and, ever after, happily vote for Eisenhower."[167] For many female Elvis fans, this is more or less what happened. Yet, the radical alternatives to hegemonic culture that fandom allowed these women to explore surely lingered in their memories, if only to remind them of the limitations of suburban housewifery (not to mention the Eisenhower administration).

It is questionable the extent to which male and female rock n roll fans' attraction to "darkness," as Breines calls it, translated into progressive racial politics. For many white fans, rock n roll undoubtedly fostered greater awareness and sympathy for black people, and probably helped instil positive attitudes towards integration. However, this was by no means the inevitable effect of rock n roll fandom. Southern rock n roll fans, for example, were amongst the most vociferous and violent protestors against the Little Rock Nine's attempts to integrate Central High in 1957. Anne Thompson, an Elvis Presley fan who confessed to screaming so loud at one of his concerts that she could not even hear the performance, was at the forefront of an angry mob of white students who surrounded and isolated black student Elizabeth Eckford as she approached the high school.[168] Another member of the Little Rock Nine, 15-year old student Melba Pattillo, noted that the main group of segregationists who harassed her most during her first year at Central High were "sideburners" who modelled their dress and behaviour on Elvis Presley and James Dean. Pete Daniel argues that for Southern segregationists, loving rock n roll and violently opposing integration were not such contradictory opinions. For example, the

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[166] Sue Wise, "Sexing Elvis" in Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (eds), On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word (London: Routledge, 1990), p.392-7

[167] Quoted in Bertrand, p.147

[168] The Century: America's Time with Peter Jennings. Volume Four: "1953-1960: Happy Daze." ABC Video and Buena Vista, 1994.

followers of agitator John Kasper – who incited many anti-integration demonstrations throughout the South – were described by observer as "low income folk… young men and women of the long-sideburn, ducktailed haircut set, bully-boys and girls who operate in packs."[169] For these youngsters whose fashion sense was clearly inspired by rock n roll, loving rock n roll and violently opposing segregation both comprised fervent rebellion against authority. Just as rock n roll disturbed parents, media commentators, the music establishment, school officials and politicians, arch segregationists like Kasper stirred up anti-authoritarian feeling towards liberal school boards attempting to integrate, northern politicians, the government and the Supreme Court.

The live rock n roll shows to which youngsters flocked also emphasised that the racial politics of rock n roll fans were ambiguous at best. Rock n roll concerts frequently drew together black and white performers and audiences in the same physical space, which was, in itself, a significant challenge to the racial order. This racial mixing was often harmonious. There are many examples of young audiences using rock n roll shows to stage impromptu experiments in integration; even at segregated Southern concerts young whites and blacks often discarded dividing ropes and danced together without incident (except for the inevitable police intervention).[170] While the dividing rope sometimes stayed in place, as it did during Chuck Berry's 1956 Southern tour where he played to "jam-packed" audiences segregated by a "six-foot wide aisle," young blacks and whites often, according to singer LaVern Baker, "broke the rope because of what you might call musical tantrums."[171] Such examples highlight rock n roll's potential to mix races in ways that discomfited adults, especially Southern segregationists. One segregationist leader, after attending a rock n roll concert in 1956, noted with disgust the cultural miscegenation displayed by a group of white teenagers whose speech was "replete with the coarse negro phrases, rolling the words easily from their lips. The

[169] Daniel, Lost Revolutions, p.271-2

[170] Carl Perkins, Little Richard and others recall such occasions fondly on The History of Rock n' Roll. Episode Two, "Good Rockin' Tonight." Dir. Bud Friedgen. Time-Life DVD, 2004.

[171] Bertrand, p.174

teenagers were white, but if one closed his eyes, the negroid [sic] conversations would convince him otherwise."[172]

The interracial violence that sometimes marred the rock n roll show, however, suggests that neither white teenagers' adoption of black speech nor youngsters' disregard of the dividing rope necessarily produced progressive racial politics. Just as some young whites who drew on the styles of black culture violently opposed the integration of Little Rock, rock n roll fans occasionally expressed their racial enmity at integrated concerts. During a black dance at Chattanooga, Tennessee in 1956, for example, tensions escalated after young whites, who were permitted to watch the dance from the balcony, continually poured soft drinks on black dancers. Violence erupted after "a Negro member of [black] singer Roy Hamilton's road show took a seat among white spectators," which precipitated "a wild, bottle-throwing, knife-wielding melee between whites and Negroes."[173] In another example of racial unrest, in 1957 a fight between white and black boys and girls following a rock n roll concert in New York led to the stabbing of a white youth; the youth was then thrown onto railway tracks and narrowly missed being hit by an on-coming train. Police lieutenant Francis Gannon told reporters that the "Negro youths were responsible for it… we expect difficulty every time a rock 'n' roll show comes in."[174] Although Gannon probably exaggerated the frequency of this brutal interracial violence, such events stress that racial tensions often exploded when black and white youths shared the same physical space. While rock n roll concerts highlight the ambiguities of the youth culture's racial politics, they nevertheless drew young whites and blacks together in ways that challenged the racial order.

Yet, technological transformations worked to segregate youngsters who were consuming the same cultural products. By the mid-1950s, developments in record player technology, including the introduction of 45 rpm singles and portable record players, and transistor radios, made music more affordable, accessible and mobile for the youth culture. Most young people enjoyed the luxury of consuming their music in their cars and

[172] Ibid., p.162

[173] Newspaper report quoted in Bertrand, p.179

[174] Altschuler, p.3

bedrooms, away from the supervision of their parents, which helped inculcate the sense of youth's cultural autonomy and control over rock n roll. Yet, as Brian Ward argues, "[p]aradoxically, while the technologies involved – jukeboxes, radios and record players – had largely dismantled the racial barriers between artists and audiences, those same technologies had also made it possible to preserve an enormous level of racial segregation among fans enjoying the same music."[175] That is, while rock n roll comprised a vital space for the youth culture's articulation of its difference from and opposition to adult culture, it tended less and less to bring diverse groups of young people together in the same physical space. Underscoring the fractured character of 1950s youth culture, youth consumed the same cultural product without interacting with one another. Thus, while rock n roll encouraged symbolic cultural miscegenation, technology allowed white audiences to enjoy black culture without sharing physical space with black people. The segregation that technology facilitated somewhat vitiated the music's integrationist potential and worked to keep distant and exotic the source of the black culture that white youth coveted.

Moreover, because black culture was ostracised by white hegemonic culture when the vanguard of young whites 'discovered' rhythm and blues in the mid-1950s, the music seemed all the more exotic and exciting to these teenagers whose childhoods were spent insulated from otherness and whose parent culture seemed so empty and lifeless. Renamed 'rock n roll', the music seemed to absorb the attractive elements of blackness as construed by the white imaginary – fervour, joy, carnal freedom, dangerous sexuality – yet lose its racial specificity. The critical mass of youth, who were attracted by these elements of blackness yet reluctant to embrace black culture openly, could adopt 'rock n roll' enthusiastically, for the music denoted not black culture but youth culture. The music signified generational difference and rebellion. It upset adults because, although it lacked an 'integrationist' consciousness, it nonetheless encouraged cultural miscegenation and challenged mythologies regarding consensus society. Rock n roll also provided the young with spaces – symbolic and real – with which to exert their collective

[175] Brian Ward, Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p.129

autonomy as a consumer group. The music's racial politics, while not irrelevant, were secondary to its role in the youth culture's fight for generational distinctiveness.

Bertrand suggests that rock n roll "did the same for whites as [it] did for blacks" by providing "the means by which to say and demonstrate 'I *am* Somebody'."[176] Bertrand is undoubtedly right in that rock n roll was vital to the formation and articulation of an autonomous youth identity freed from adult control. This was not "the same" for blacks and whites, though. A key difference split black and white youth's articulations of "I *am* Somebody" through rock n roll. As we saw in the previous chapter, blacks asserted their 'somebodyness' in response to exploitative, dehumanising and demeaning racial prejudice and oppression, yet white racism necessarily shaped the parameters of this assertion. Young whites asserted their 'somebodyness' in response to the perceived spiritual poverty and 'nobodyness' (or banality of homogenous 'everybodyness') of hegemonic whiteness, and did so through their adoption of black culture. Yet, as I will argue in the next chapter, the music establishment largely succeeded in moderating rock n roll's rebelliousness by working to sever the music's links with black culture, underscoring both the tenuousness of white youth's connection to black culture and the limitations of the youth culture's autonomy.

[176] Bertrand, p.234

Chapter 6

Restructuring the Music Industry and the Reconfiguration of Containment

Early in 1960, after returning to Memphis following his military duty, Elvis Presley showed the members of Hollywood on Ice, a travelling ice show, around his palatial Graceland estate. Pausing at his custom-made soda fountain, Presley boasted to his sixty guests of rumours that Nikita Khrushchev would visit Presley at home so that the Soviet premier could "see how in America a fellow can start out with nothing and, you know, make good."[1] It is intriguing to consider what Khrushchev would have made of both Graceland and Presley's success. Given how scathing the Soviet premier had been about the materialism of suburban America during the "kitchen debates" with Vice President Richard Nixon, he was likely to revile Graceland's kitschy ostentation, probably note the modest houses that lined the rest of Presley's street and stress the inequities of the American system. Considering the relish with which the Soviets reported America's troubled race relations, Khrushchev might have also inquired whether the black artists that Presley imitated lived in such lavish abodes.

Although the visit never eventuated, the prospect of propagandists using Elvis Presley to demonstrate the success of American capitalism to its Communist enemy is ironic given America's vitriolic reaction to Presley as the emblem of the nascent youth culture that emerged during the early Cold War period. To many adults, the youthful rebellion that Presley symbolised was even more threatening to the national consensus than Communism. One correspondent to the Senate Subcommittee on Delinquency epitomised the hostility that many adults harboured toward both Presley and the youth culture: "Elvis Presley is a symbol, of course, but a dangerous one. His strip-tease antics threaten to 'rock-n-roll' the juvenile world into open revolt against society. The gangster of tomorrow is the Elvis Presley of today."[2] Such fears were commonplace. Many adults

[1] Peter Guralnick, Careless Love: The Unmaking of Elvis Presley (London: Little, Brown, and Company, 1999), p.58

[2] James Gilbert, A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.18

felt that the youth culture represented a separate and menacing "juvenile world" that was waging a battle against mainstream society. Some adults feared that popular figures like Presley, who subverted notions of the national consensus by coupling sensuality with class and racial difference, were inciting youngsters to emulate this assault on hegemonic values.

To an extent, such fears were justified. As this work has stressed, 1950s youth did look to media figures both to inform their construction of their 'youthful' identities and to bind to a 'youth culture' that collectively celebrated these figures. Moreover, this collective youth culture was to a large extent bound together by a rejection of adult culture. Teenagers indeed sought to inhabit a "juvenile world" that was opposed to the world of adults, but predictions of a rising tide of young gangsters were unjustified. The youth culture was not interested in anarchy or revolution, but, among other things, in carving out their own autonomous space within consumer culture.

By the early 1960s, youth had succeeded in this, though not without granting some concessions to the parent culture. Presley's fate to a large extent mirrored the eventual incorporation of the youth culture. Presley followed his subdued performance on the Steve Allen Show in July 1956 with a string of tepid singles inspired more by the styles of the 'pop' market than the earthy rhythm and blues that characterised his early recordings. In 1958, he was drafted into the army. Although Presley had amassed a sufficient backlog to allow a steady release of singles during his absence, his stint in the military undoubtedly did much to modulate his public image. By the time Presley returned home, he appeared chastened and tamed. His appearance on the television special Frank Sinatra Welcomes Home Elvis Presley in 1960 was indicative of his rehabilitated image. Presley embraced Sinatra, who just two years earlier had testified to a congressional subcommittee that rock n roll was "the most brutal, desperate, vicious form of expression it has been my misfortune to hear," that it was written and sung "for the most part by cretinous goons"[3] and that Presley's hits "Hound Dog" and "All Shook

[3] Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo, Rock 'n' Roll Is Here to Pay: The History and Politics of the Music Industry (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1977), p.46

Up" were among its worst examples.[4] Ominously for fans of "gyratin' Elvis," Presley sported a close-cropped military haircut; he also abandoned his sideburns.[5] By 1960, Presley had diligently served his country in the military, had stopped gyrating his controversial pelvis, and had largely abandoned his links with black culture that so outraged white America. Hence he was a 'reformed' character, not a menacing revolutionary but a shining example of America's virtues, fit to parade before foreign leaders.

Like Presley, by the early 1960s, youth culture had taken on a less rebellious visage, appearing somewhat more wholesome, less sneering and less 'black'. Adults increasingly accepted the youth culture and viewed its existence not as an ominous portent of social anarchy but as a normal and benign manifestation of the transitional stage between childhood and adulthood. Reconfigured, the concept of 'youth' now connoted positive values. President John F. Kennedy, for example, deliberately used notions of 'youth' to shore up confidence in his administration, stressing the 'youth' of America as a nation.[6] Kennedy's presidential campaign deliberately emphasised Kennedy's youth in contrast to the "grandfatherly" administration of Eisenhower. Kennedy also associated the concept of youth with vibrancy, endeavour and optimism by yoking it to his vision of the "New Frontier."[7] He rallied all Americans "to be pioneers on that New Frontier. My call is to the young at heart regardless of age."[8]

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[4] Brian Ward, Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p.120

[5] According to the "Elvis Leaves the Army" newsreel, contained on Jukebox Rock 'n' Roll Volume One DVD. V&H Holdings, 2005

[6] Kennedy marshalled the new positive iconography of youth both in his public persona and political rhetoric, helping to enshrine youth "as a signifier for a newly prosperous age of fun, freedom and social harmony." Bill Osgerby, "Full Throttle on the Highway to Hell: Mavericks, Machismo and Mayhem in the American Biker Movie" in Xavier Mendik and Steven Jay Schneider (eds), Underground USA: Filmmaking Beyond the Hollywood Canon (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), p.129

[7] Stanley Corkin, Cowboys as Cold Warriors: The Western and U. S. History (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), p.232-4. Kennedy's "New Frontier" promised to reinvent containment. Kennedy stressed that his administration would pursue a more interventionist foreign policy than that practiced by Eisenhower's administration. As Corkin puts it, Kennedy "entered the presidency with a disposition to contest what he felt was the undue influence of the Soviet Union in underdeveloped countries. In contrast to Eisenhower's relative caution, the Kennedy administration actively sought to engage the hearts and minds of those who resided in the nonindustrial [sic] regions of Asia and Africa, seeing those places as vital sites of Cold War competition with the Soviet Union." Corkin, p.208

Kennedy's exhortation to all Americans to aspire to youth marked a significant shift from prevalent definitions of youth during the 1950s. During the Eisenhower years, youth was synonymous with juvenile delinquency, rock n roll and social chaos; teenagers were dangerous others that threatened mainstream America and needed to be contained. Youth, however, was central to Kennedy's reinvention of containment, evoking the vitality and boldness necessary to confront the "challenges" of the New Frontier.[9] Although Kennedy's political rhetoric did not single-handedly revolutionise America's prevailing attitude toward the young, it certainly contributed to the rehabilitation of the meaning of youth in the early 1960s.

Ironically, although at the turn of the decade adults believed that young people were generally more wholesome, statistics suggest that in fact teenagers were finally fulfilling predictions of a juvenile delinquency epidemic. Youth crime rates, especially violent crime, spiked in the early 1960s.[10] This dissonance between the perception of well-behaved youngsters and the reality of increasing youth crime in the early 1960s inversely mirrored the early 1950s, when teenagers were demonised as criminals despite a decelerating youth crime rate. This dissonance suggests that 1950s juvenile delinquency hysteria was produced principally by fears of youth's cultural practices rather than its criminality. That is, because adults saw the new youth culture as menacingly 'other' in the mid-1950s, they believed that young people's engagement in youth cultural practices portended delinquency. Once adults became accustomed to the phenomenon of a youth culture, and changes to the youth culture made it seem more acceptable, the perceived link between participation in the youth culture and juvenile delinquency was severed.

The restructuring of the music industry at the end of the 1950s was crucial to transforming adults' perceptions of the youth culture. Forces opposing rock n roll failed to eradicate the music but succeeded in moderating much of its rebelliousness, primarily

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[8] Quoted in ibid., p.234

[9] Ibid., p.233-4

[10] Gilbert, p.14. As evidence of an increase in youth criminality in the 1960s, Gilbert cites Children's Bureau statistics that showed a slight rise of 20% in Children's Court cases between 1950 and 1960, commensurate with the increasing population of youth, but a steep rise of 60% from 1960 to 1970. Gilbert, p.71

by suppressing many of its links to black culture. As we will see, the advent of Top 40 radio and the 'Philadelphia sound' enabled the dominant players in the music industry to filter out 'undesirable' (namely black-styled) performers in favour of unthreatening young white singers. These pallid new stars then inspired a new wave of youth film, as clean-cut beach-dwelling teenagers supplanted city-prowling knife-wielding juvenile delinquents in dominant representations of the youth culture by the end of the 1950s.

Restructuring of the Music Industry

By the end of the 1950s, the shape of rock n roll was changing. To an extent, a series of unfortunate events that afflicted rock n roll's biggest stars necessitated a change in personnel at the top of the charts. Some rock n rollers were lured into national service, like Presley, or religious service, like Little Richard. In 1957, after seeing a satellite in the sky at an outdoor concert in Australia and taking it as a sign from God, Little Richard abandoned the sacrilegious sounds of rock n roll for the piety of the pulpit. As an act of contrition, he sheared his trademark pompadour and threw his diamond jewels into a river.

Other stars suffered less dignified exits from rebellious rock n roll. Shortly after attaining the remarkable success of topping the pop, rhythm and blues and country charts simultaneously with his "Blue Suede Shoes," Carl Perkins was involved in a car accident that necessitated a year of convalescence and stalled his rock n roll career. Jerry Lee Lewis became embroiled in controversy while touring Britain when the press discovered that his young wife was just fourteen (she was actually twelve when they married) and was Lewis's cousin. (What was less widely reported was that Lewis was still married to his previous wife.) Gene Vincent and Eddie Cochran were in the same car accident en route to Heathrow Airport to return to America after a successful British tour; Vincent re-broke the leg that had ended his military service and Cochran was killed on impact. In 1959, the Big Bopper (who scored a national hit with "Chantilly Lace"), Buddy Holly and Richie Valens, the emerging seventeen year old Chicano singing sensation, were all killed in the same plane crash. Meanwhile, Chuck Berry was imprisoned for Mann Act violations, and pubescent Frankie Lymon parted from The Teenagers, before his increasing drug and alcohol problems afflicted his career.

Disruptive as these misfortunes were to individual stars, it was at the industrial level that changes of more long-term significance for the future direction of rock n roll were happening. That is, the emergence of rock n roll was largely propelled by small independent companies, and this threatened the dominance of the 'music establishment' – the major labels and their publishing wing ASCAP that had monopolised the music industry since the 1930s. By the late 1950s these major labels were moving to reassert their control over the industry. Initially, the music establishment responded to the threat of rock n roll by coalescing with forces opposed to rock n roll, such as adult authorities, southern segregationists and self-appointed arbiters of 'good taste' and 'public decency', to censor the youth cultural phenomenon. When efforts to demonise rock n roll seemed only to increase its appeal among teenagers, the music establishment set about attacking the forces they alleged were responsible for disseminating rock n roll, first the music publishers and then the disc jockeys who played the music. I will argue that the music establishment applied the logic of containment when painting rock n roll as outside the national consensus. By doing this, the music establishment successfully lobbied politicians, forcing a Senate subcommittee to investigate the alleged conspiracies that had engineered the rise of rock n roll. While this initial investigation failed to thwart rock n roll, the latter attack on rock n roll's broadcasters, known as the payola scandal, succeeded in reforming radio formats in such a way as to impede independent labels' entry into the marketplace and to enable major labels to sculpt radio stations' playlists.

The Rise of the Independents in the Late 1940s and 1950s

The popularity of rhythm and blues and then rock n roll among young whites came as an unwelcome surprise to the music establishment. The major labels – RCA-Victor, Columbia, Capitol, MGM, Mercury and Decca – had monopolised the music industry and had, they felt, largely moulded American musical tastes and consumption habits since the Depression had wiped out their smaller competitors. Each of the majors was vertically integrated, owning manufacturing plants and directly controlling the distribution outlets for their records. Each had small subsidiary labels that distributed music to each distinct record market: pop, hillbilly (later, country), race (from 1949 rhythm and blues), religious (or gospel) and classical. This monopoly enabled the majors

to capitalise on each passing musical phase, from Jimmie Rodgers' 'blue yodel' of the late 1920s to the swing craze of the 1940s. World War Two imperilled the music industry because of the shortage of shellac, the principal ingredient in making 78rpm records. If record consumers wanted to hear new music, they were forced to swap their old shellac records, which would be melted down, for new ones. Despite this, there was not enough shellac to supply all markets and the music industry all but abandoned the 'marginal' markets of hillbilly and race, focusing primarily on the production of pop music for the middle class white consumer.[11]

After the war, the major labels were slow to resume record production for markets they had abandoned during the shellac shortage. Advances in recording and record pressing technology reduced the cost of producing records and enabled many independent labels[12] servicing local communities to emerge. The capital expenditure required to record and press five hundred copies of a record was approximately $1000 in the late 1940s.[13] Over 400 record companies formed in the 1940s, mostly serving the country and rhythm and blues markets the majors were ignoring.[14] In the country market, this allowed several independent companies to profit, especially King, whose artists Moon Mullican and Cowboy Copas sold four million records between them, and Imperial, whose artist Slim Whitman achieved incredible success after the war. These successes, along with Hank Williams's surprise success at MGM in the late 1940s, which was

[11] Chapple and Garofalo, p.8, 15

[12] I use the term 'independents' to denote what should more correctly (but clumsily) be called 'non-majors', realising that the term 'independents', as Brian Ward points out, tends to obfuscate important differences among these companies. For instance, some 'independents' – like the seven largest rhythm and blues 'independents' Aladdin, Atlantic, Chess, King, Modern, Savoy and Specialty – enjoyed nationwide distribution, while others, like Philadelphia's Junior, only serviced local neighbourhoods. Some, like King, had their own record plant pressing facilities, while others did not. Companies like Atlantic nurtured artists, signing them to long-term contracts and establishing their longevity in the market as 'stars', while others favoured recording one-off singles with transient artists. Moreover, the term 'independents' often minimises the fact that many of these companies, like the majors, had extensive connections with, and were subject to the dominant commercial forces within, the record industry. Brian Ward, Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p.23-6

[13] Philip H. Ennis, The Seventh Stream: The Emergence of Rocknroll in American Popular Music (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1992), p.176

[14] George Lipsitz, Class and Culture in Cold War America: "A Rainbow at Midnight" (Praeger, 1981), p.206

predominantly a label for distributing movie soundtracks, impelled the industry to reinvigorate its country arms, and by the early 1950s it was once again dominating this market.[15]

While eager to re-enter the country market, the majors did not move to enter the rhythm and blues market. This was probably due to institutionalised racism of the major labels. Additionally, the majors had had lost touch with the listening habits of black consumers and severed connections with black distributors. Moreover, harbouring contempt for the rhythm and blues market as small, unsophisticated (thus erratic and unpredictable) and risky, the majors had little interest in re-establishing these ties and no motivation to seek out new black talent. Small independents, of which the most profitable and enduring were New York's Atlantic (with significant connections in Atlanta, Memphis, New Orleans and Macon), Chicago's Chess, Memphis's Sun, Cincinnati's King, Houston's Duke/Peacock and Specialty, Modern and Imperial all based in Los Angeles, filled the gap the majors left.

Generally, white entrepreneurs with businesses in black communities initiated these labels, with the limited ambition of servicing a local market that the majors largely ignored. The establishment of Chicago's Chess Records, which had much success with Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley, was typical. Polish immigrant brothers Leonard and Phil Chess owned a series of night clubs, one of which was the Macamba Lounge, which played jazz and blues in a black neighbourhood. The Chess brothers decided to put out records of performers at their own clubs after first noticing a dearth of recording opportunities for the performers who appeared in their clubs.[16] The Chess brothers' motivation was very similar to Sam Phillips' ambition for Sun Studios, as a site where local black acts could record and preserve their music.

Although most independent labels lasted less than five years, others went on to enjoy nationwide success. Independent labels dominated the rhythm and blues charts, producing twenty-two of the top thirty rhythm and blues songs of 1954. By 1956, the year that rock n roll began to dominate the charts, independents produced ten of the nineteen biggest selling records, and most of the other nine records came from Bill Haley

[15] Chapple and Garofalo, p.8-9

[16] Ibid., p.37

and Elvis Presley, both of whom had started with independents before signing with major labels. In 1957, independents enjoyed 29 of the top-selling 43 singles.[17] Moreover, independent label Sun produced two of the three performers to ever top all three nationwide charts simultaneously (Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins); the other was RCA's Presley, a former Sun recording artist.

Sun's success highlights not only the ascendance of independent labels but also their ability to transcend and obliterate the carefully segregated markets that the majors had established. As we saw earlier, pop, country, and rhythm and blues were categorised as such because of the different distribution markets they serviced. There was occasional 'cross-over' between these markets; for example, Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" appeared on all three charts in 1943.[18] But the usual tactic of the music industry to forestall cross-overs was to have a performer from one market cover a successful song from another market. One example of many: Atlantic Records had a rhythm and blues hit in 1951 with the Clovers' "Fool Fool Fool," which remained on the rhythm and blues charts for twenty-two weeks. Kay Starr, of Capitol Records, covered the song and took it into the pop charts.[19] In the early 1950s, on the strength of young white consumers, rhythm and blues records increasingly crossed over into the pop charts (but never the country charts), but these records were often covered for the pop market as well, which usually stalled the progress of the original up the pop charts. One example of this is the Chords' rhythm and blues hit "Sh' Boom," on Atlantic, which reached the pop charts before white group the Crew Cuts' cover version accelerated past it thanks to their label Mercury's superior distribution.[20] From 1956 onwards, when rock n roll was ascendant,[21] these categories no longer held. The percentage of records in the country charts that crossed over into another market rose from just 3% in 1955 to 33% in 1956 and 64% in 1957. The percentage of cross-over hits was even higher for the rhythm and blues charts,

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[17] Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave, Anti-Rock: The Opposition to Rock 'n' Roll (New York: Da Capo Press, 1990), p.11

[18] Ennis, p.200

[19] Ibid., p.215

[20] Ibid., p.217

[21] Despite its ascendance, rock n roll was not given its own chart.

leaping from 29% in 1955 to 76% in 1956 and 87% in 1957.[22] This crossover is directly attributable to the rise of rock n roll and the youth consumers who were buying 70% of all records sold in America by 1958.[23]

The Backlash Against Rhythm and Blues and Rock n Roll

The cross-pollination between markets clearly threatened the dominance of the major labels. They had not anticipated white youngster's consumption of rhythm and blues or the emergence of rock n roll, and they initially found no way to harness the burgeoning youth market apart from signing a handful of rock n rollers, as Capitol did with Gene Vincent, RCA with Elvis Presley and Decca with Buddy Holly and Bill Haley. In general, the music establishment devoted its energies to censoring rock n roll. Major label representatives joined moral groups, anxious parents and other offended citizens in attacking what they characterised as the immoral and lewd content (or, as the press dubbed it, "leer-ics") of rock n roll songs. White youth's consumption of rhythm and blues had sparked this controversy in the early 1950s, as some disc jockeys and concerned parents objected to songs like the Dominoes' "Sixty Minute Man" and Hank Ballard and the Midnighters' "Work With Me Annie" ("Annie please don't cheat/Give me all my meat") and its sequel "Annie Had a Baby." At the forefront of the condemnation was Peter Potter, a radio disc jockey and television host of *Juke Box Jury*, a show where the audience rated current records. Potter abhorred the popularity of rhythm and blues among whites, condemning the music in 1954 as "obscene and of lewd intonation, and certainly not fit for radio broadcast." He railed: "all rhythm and blues records are dirty and as bad for kids as dope."[24] This fury was soon redoubled against rock n roll. Critics rebuked not only the music's perceived obscenity but also its infantilism. As editor of the Denver Post put it: "This hooby-dooby, oop-shoop, ootie ootie, boom boom de-addy boom, scoobledy goobedy dump – is trash." Time magazine described rock n roll as comprising "a vocal group that shudders and exercises violently

[22] Ibid., p.241

[23] Lawrence Grossberg, We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Popular Culture (New York: Routledge, 1992), p.280

[24] Martin and Segrave, p.16

to the beat while roughly chanting either a near-nonsense phrase or a moronic lyric in hillbilly idiom."[25]

In 1955, Variety ran a three-part editorial series on the "leer-ic garbage."[26] In its part entitled "A Warning to the Music Business," it worried about the societal effects of sexual innuendo in song: "What are we talking about? We're talking about 'rock & roll,' about 'hug,' and 'squeeze,' and kindred euphemisms which are attempting a total breakdown of all reticence about sex."[27] In part two, the editor blamed "any number of independent diskery labels which neither know nor care about ethics and concern about potential juvenile delinquency" as the culprit for promoting rock n roll and demeaning community standards. In part three, Variety claimed to have widespread public support for its position, including endorsements from major labels Decca and RCA.[28] Not coincidentally, the trade paper's attack on rock n roll articulated the precise concerns of its main source of advertising revenue, the major labels, who were increasingly threatened by independents' success.

The major labels' endorsement of the Variety editorial foreshadowed the music establishment's subsequent efforts to wrest dominance of the industry back from the independent labels. Esteemed representatives from major labels soon began decrying the harm that independent labels and their cheaply produced and 'obscene' music was doing to both the music industry and society at large. Frank Sinatra, signed to Columbia, complained that "rock n roll smells phony and false… [and] by means of its almost imbecilic reiterations and sly – lewd – in plain fact dirty – lyrics… it manages to be the martial music of every side-burned delinquent on the face of the earth."[29] Colleague Sammy Davis Jr threatened "if rock n roll is here to stay, I might commit suicide."[30]

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[25] Steve Perry, "Ain't No Mountain High Enough: The Politics of Crossover" in Simon Frith (ed), Facing the Music (London: Mandarin, 1990), p.70

[26] Martin and Segrave, p.19

[27] Quoted in Trent Hill, "The Enemy Within: Censorship in Rock Music in the 1950s" in Anthony De Curtis (ed), Present Tense: Rock & Roll and Culture (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), p.47

[28] Martin and Segrave, p.19

[29] Quoted in Hill, p.51

[30] Chapple and Garofalo, p.47

Mitch Miller, composer and producer of such vapid pop songs as "How Much is that Doggie in the Window," also of Columbia, charged that rock n roll was the "glorification of monotony." He also alleged that rock n roll "seems to encourage sloppy clothes that become the accepted uniform. The kids take it all without discrimination. It's one step from fascism."[31]

Charles Hamm summarised an erroneous argument that the purveyors of 'good' music frequently made: "Since [rock n roll] was an oral music, not written down, performed by a small number of players who had the music in their heads or improvised it on the spot, there was no need for arrangers, studio orchestras, or copyists… [rock n roll] threatened the jobs of many thousands of people."[32] While some early rock n roll had no need for studio orchestras and made scant use of arrangers, much of it, like that produced by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, made extensive use of orchestral arrangements. Hamm's gross generalisation that all rock n rollers were musically illiterate revealed the elitism of his testimony. The biggest threat to professional occupations in the music industry, in fact, were performers like Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly and James Brown, who largely arranged their own music, and Eddie Cochran, who controlled most aspects of production (and, by pioneering overdubbing, played most of the instruments on his records, too). By implying that rock n roll was completely unplanned and spontaneous, Hamm was drawing on long-held stereotypes surrounding the lack of sophistication of white and black rural music. Such snobbery ultimately characterised ASCAP's allegations against rock n roll and its supporters.

ASCAP vs BMI

The first major point of attack for the music establishment to reassert control of the industry centred on music publishing, specifically the battle between the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), the major labels' music licensing arm, and its competitor Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI). ASCAP had enjoyed a monopoly over music publishing until the 1940s and its elaborate structures tended to favour established Tin Pan Alley songwriters rather than country or blues musicians.

[31] Martin and Segrave, p.46

[32] Quoted in Perry, p.70

ASCAP's job was to collect royalties on songs they owned, but when in 1940 they threatened a large increase in royalty fees to broadcasters and other firms that used music, the broadcasters established a non-profit organisation, BMI, to license music. After an initial stand-off between ASCAP and the broadcasters in 1941, which resulted in broadcasters only playing public domain and new BMI songs for a period of ten months, the two sides reached an uneasy compromise over royalty rates and ASCAP artists resumed their domination of the airwaves. But antagonism between the two sides remained. While ASCAP retained control over the mainstream pop field, the most lucrative part of the business, BMI tended to represent markets that ASCAP wilfully neglected, principally the 'race' and 'hillbilly' markets. Because rock n roll emerged from these markets, when it broke BMI collected the royalties and became the dominant music publisher, while ASCAP's Tin Pan Alley songwriters fell under threat.

The emergence of rock n roll, then, intensified pre-existing antagonism between ASCAP and BMI. ASCAP alleged a wide conspiracy on the part of BMI's owners, which included several major radio stations, to promote rock n roll and other songs for which BMI held publishing rights. ASCAP brought suit against BMI in the early 1950s, impelling the House Judiciary Anti-Trust Subcommittee in 1956 to stage hearings investigating a possible conflict of interest in the radio industry. Representatives like Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Mitch Miller, Aaron Copland, Vance Packard and Oscar Hammerstein testified on behalf of ASCAP and the major labels. Much of their testimony attested to the dearth of 'quality' material on the radio, which implied that broadcasters were deliberately favouring BMI songs over ASCAP. During the 1956 hearings, ASCAP writer Billy Rose gave colourful testimony when he claimed that BMI was "responsible for rock-and-roll and the other musical monstrosities which are muddying up the airwaves…. It's the current climate on radio and television which makes Elvis Presley and his animal posturings possible…. [Rock n roll] is a set of untalented twitchers and twisters whose appeal is largely to the zoot suiter and the juvenile delinquent."[33] Professor Arlan Coolidge of Brown University typified this kind of testimony in the first hearing when he lamented the "almost complete absence of the fine tunes by Berlin, Jerome Kern, Cole Porter and many other gifted composers" on the radio. Positing that

[33] Martin and Segrave, p.88

broadcasters had brainwashed the country's youth, for "every advertiser knows the constant repetition of an idea sinks into public consciousness," he alleged that teenagers listened to rock n roll because they "haven't a chance even to hear Hammerstein's music very much [but] they have heard the rock and roll and the cheaper music and that to them is music."[34]

The subcommittee was clearly sympathetic to ASCAP's case. Subcommittee chairman Emmanuel Celler's colleagues wondered whether his "ardor" for ASCAP representatives "hadn't gone too far for the occasion" and described it as "embarrassing." Following the investigations, Celler was a guest speaker at ASCAP's annual dinner and used the occasion to criticise BMI and the corrupt links between it and the broadcasters.[35] Yet Celler's subcommittee adjourned inconclusively in June 1957, merely referring the matter for further investigation to the Senate Interstate and Foreign Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, which sat in 1958.

The 1958 hearings reiterated many of the themes of the first hearings. Vance Packard testified that rock n roll was "cheap" in more than just a cultural sense because it did not require expensive, union-scale musicians and orchestras or expensive professional tunesmiths, and it in fact threatened these custodians of quality music. Revealing his class and racial prejudices, he attacked rock n roll for being inspired by hillbilly and "race music modified to stir the animal instinct in teenagers. Its chief characteristics now are a heavy, unrelenting beat and a raw, savage tone. The lyrics tend to be either nonsensical, lewd, or both." Packard also foreshadowed the subsequent 'payola' hearings when he blamed "conniving disc jockeys" who had, he alleged, multifaceted investments in rock n roll and were profiting from their deliberate corruption of public tastes.[36] Burton Lane, president of the American Guild of Authors and Composers (AGAC), many members of which published with ASCAP, echoed allegations from the Celler hearings, claiming BMI had "achieved control of American popular music through forced feeding of rock

[34] Ennis, p.260

[35] Martin and Segrave, p.88

[36] Ibid., p.89; Glenn C. Altschuler, All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.137; Hill, p.59-60

'n' roll music to the public."[37] Once again, ASCAP received a sympathetic hearing. Although the senators generally did not find the intricate disputes between the music publishers compelling, they agreed that rock n roll was corrosive and needed to be eradicated. As Senator John Pastore said: "What difference does it make who is doing the poisoning? Does it not become the responsibility of the Congress to remove the cause and the source?"[38]

Yet, the senators did not agree on how to eradicate the music. Some of ASCAP's testimony also polarised the subcommittee. For example, Senator Albert Gore, Sr. objected to Packard's "gratuitous insult to thousands of our fellow Tennesseans, both in and out of the field of country music" made during Packard's characterisation of BMI's performers.[39] Some of ASCAP's testimony was also baseless, like Oscar Hammerstein's claim that BMI, in league with the broadcasters, was "limiting the songs from which the public might select its favourites," implying that more BMI than ASCAP material was being broadcast. Statistics proved that although the three major networks and 623 stations out of the 3,362 on air held stakes in BMI, 85 percent of copyrighted music played on radio and 90 percent on television was licensed by ASCAP.[40] Moreover, the charge that as stockholders the radio stations profited from broadcasts of BMI-licensed material was erroneous because, as a non-profit organisation, BMI never paid a dividend.[41] Moreover, whether stations played a song licensed by BMI or ASCAP, they would have to pay approximately the same royalty, so there was no financial benefit to preferring BMI material. Also damaging to ASCAP's case was testimony from writers like Mae Boren Axton, the veteran school teacher from Florida who wrote Presley's hit "Heartbreak Hotel" but never received a reply from ASCAP to her many letters requesting membership.[42] Such testimony engendered the perception that ASCAP was elitist and

[37] Martin and Segrave, p.89

[38] Hill, p.60

[39] Ibid., p.61

[40] Martin and Segrave, p.89

[41] Chapple and Garofalo, p.66

[42] Hill, p.61

protectionist, and that its royalty structure unfairly favoured established songwriters who were aligned with major labels. This perception underscored BMI's role in catering to those ASCAP rejected.

Although these hearings did little officially to thwart rock n roll, they did magnify the impression that rock n roll was corrosive. This intensified efforts to eliminate the music. Following the lead of localities like Asbury Park, Troy and Newark (Connecticut) that banned rock n roll concerts in 1958, some radio stations banned rock n roll.[43] The Mutual Broadcasting System was typical of stations that banned some forms of rock n roll, specifically songs that contained "distorted, monotonous, noisy music and/or suggestive or borderline salacious lyrics." Among the list of banned songs were Bobby Darin's "Splish Splash," "Yakety Yak" by the Coasters and "Hard Headed Woman" by Elvis Presley.[44] KEX of Portland, Oregon fired one of its disc jockeys for playing Presley's version of "White Christmas" instead of a more respectable rendition.[45] Other stations, like KWK, banned rock n roll outright after its "rock n roll record-breaking week" (during which it literally destroyed rock n roll records), announcing its ban "will give us the opportunity to program to the largest mass audience; teenagers, adults, all will enjoy the new sound of KWK!"[46] One radio station in Erie, Pennsylvania loaded over 7000 rock n roll records into a hearse and led a procession to Erie Harbour, where the records were thrown overboard to signify the death of rock n roll.[47]

The Payola Hearings

Although some radio stations rejected rock n roll, other stations remained committed to luring the profitable youth market. ASCAP renewed its attacks against rock n roll by targeting these stations and in particular the disc jockeys that played rock n roll.

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[43] Martin and Segrave, p.36-7

[44] Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak, The Fifties: The Way We Really Were (New York: Doubleday, 1977), p.307

[45] Ibid.

[46] Audio of this is included on Disc 4 of the CD box-set Loud, Fast and Out of Control: The Wild Sounds of '50s Rock. CD: Rhino, 1999.

[47] J. Ronald Oakley, God's Country: America in the Fifties (New York: Dembner Books, 1986), p.283

Having failed to prove a conspiracy between BMI and broadcasters, ASCAP, with reluctant support from the majors[48], alleged that independent labels affiliated with BMI were engaging in unfair trading practices by paying radio stations and individual disc jockeys to play rock n roll music. This practice was known as payola, and to an extent the allegations were true. In order to compete with major labels' superior distribution and promotion, independent labels often directly paid or otherwise compensated disc jockeys who played their songs. As an example of indirect compensation, Alan Freed received co-writer's credit and subsequent royalties for Chuck Berry's "Maybellene" and the Moonglows' "Sincerely" as compensation for promoting the records on his radio show even though Freed's contribution to the composition of these songs was dubious (Freed had never met Berry, for example). The more common method was direct payment, where independent labels would compensate disc jockeys if they helped make one of their songs a hit. Because of the meagre incomes of disc jockeys, there was widespread industry acceptance of this practice, and an expectation that jockeys would supplement their incomes through record promotion in some capacity. In disc jockeys' defence, they seldom promoted records they did not like and often refused to promote records that they felt might damage their reputations as arbiters of hip music among youth audiences.

While Freed's songwriting credits and the like were ethically questionable, there was nothing illegal about payola. Major labels affiliated with ASCAP engaged in similar practices even before pre-recorded music dominated radio broadcasts. Most majors employed promotional representatives to manage jukeboxes, and one of their methods of ensuring exposure for their label's new releases was to pay bar patrons to play certain records at peak times. When promoting pre-recorded music to radio stations, major labels compelled jockeys to promote their records through inducements like free concert tickets and all-expenses-paid trips, and through threats to withhold advertising and star appearances.

This combination of inducements and threats proved ineffective in thwarting the rise of rock n roll. Initially, the major labels made no overtures to jockeys who played rhythm and blues and rock n roll. Realising this error, the majors made belated attempts

[48] The majors were reluctant to join this crusade against the disc jockeys because they relied on jockeys to promote their music in locales that independent labels dominated, and they also relied on jockeys to scout new talent. Ennis, p.262

to woo these jockeys when they staged disc jockey conventions at Kansas City and Miami Beach in 1958 and 1959. The majors sought to influence 2500 jockeys to play 'quality' ASCAP material during a barrage of "Booze, Bribes and Broads." Succeeding only in making themselves the laughing stock of the music industry, the major labels turned against the jockeys they failed to influence.[49] ASCAP and the major labels with which they were affiliated hypocritically accused independent labels of unfairly influencing radio playlists by compensating jockeys when the majors themselves attempted to wield precisely the same influence through less direct means. Lacking the capital and industry connections of the majors, the independents often had no other option than to pay jockeys to expose their records.

Major labels' accusations gained traction in the wake of the television quiz show scandal in the late 1950s, which revealed that television producers fixed quiz shows by feeding answers to some contestants and paying others to lose. Sensing a similarly sensational conspiracy in the radio industry, the Commerce Committee Legislative Oversight subcommittee investigated payola in 1960. The hearings invited disc jockeys to testify against both payola and rock n roll, admitting their complicity, guilt and remorse in a confessional manner that recalled the HUAC hearings in Hollywood just over a decade earlier. Many co-operated with the subcommittee. For example, Boston disc jockey Norm Prescott, who had been a proponent of rock n roll and had famously offered a lock of Elvis Presley's hair as a prize during a promotion on his radio show, testified that rock n roll would "never get on the air" if not for payola, insisting that the practice began in 1947, the year that the independents became dominant in the rhythm and blues market. The subcommittee was clearly sympathetic to this confessional testimony, choosing to ignore the testimony of Paul Ackerman, editor of Billboard, who alleged that payola was "rampant" in the 1930s, well before the era of the disc jockey and rock n roll.[50] Chairman of the subcommittee Oren Harris typified the panel's attitude toward rock n roll when he averred "when this music, if you can call it music, that is anything but wholesome is forced onto [young people] at that age. I think it is the worst possible

[49] Ibid.

[50] Martin and Segrave, p.90-1

service that the medium [of radio] could be used for."[51] When one witness suggested that rock n roll's success was not attributable to payola but to young people's tastes, Harris raged: "I wholeheartedly disagree with you, based on the information we have here. There is no question in my mind but that a lot of these so-called hit tunes and questionable records, insofar as acceptable music is concerned, would never have reached the top had it not been for the various unusual ways of getting them there."[52] The hearings concluded with the subcommittee recommending legislation against payola.

By accusing firstly BMI and then the disc jockeys of conspiring to foment the rise of rock n roll, the music establishment appealed to the logic of containment. Representatives of the major labels portrayed BMI and the payola-pocketing disc jockeys as existing outside the normal machinations of the music industry and hence, they implied, outside the national consensus. Packard, for instance, alleged that BMI had been infiltrated by unhealthy foreign influences:

> In short, a shrewd newcomer to this country came to BMI and pointed out a neglected lode of cheaply mined music. BMI set him up in the business of exploiting this long-scorned vein, and almost overnight the sound of the 'heartbeat of America' came wailing and stomping over the airways, from thousands of radio stations.[53]

Packard's testimony both invokes containment and exposes its contradictions. Although his allegation that foreign influence kindles the "heartbeat of America" – by which he means country and black music – surely evokes the spectre of class-based Communist revolution, his implicit fear of the "wailing and stomping" of the working classes betrays anxiety about the efficacy of the 'classless' national consensus. Taken to its logical extreme, Packard's testimony warns that Russian agents could use BMI as a conduit to incite America's "neglected lode" of people to revolt.

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[51] Ibid., p.91. Harris himself had some troubles with conflict of interest; as well as being connected with the Federal Communications Commission, Harris also owned a 25% share in a television station in Arkansas, which, before Harris chaired the Commerce Committee, had problems renewing its license. Once this was exposed, Harris was forced to sell his share of the station, though he remained chairman of the committee. Chapple and Garofalo, p.62

[52] Martin and Segrave, p.91-2

[53] Hill, p.60

When attention turned to the disc jockeys, witness testimony frequently invoked the brainwashing potential of radio to dictate tastes, again alluding to containment logic. Ironically, despite the rabid anti-communism of the Subcommittee's members, as well as many of those submitting expert and witness testimony, the hearings tended to echo the criticism of the media's pernicious influence proffered by prominent Marxists like Theodore Adorno, who influentially claimed that the culture industry coerced and 'brainwashed' the populace. For example, psychotherapist Dr. Walter Hayden framed his letter of support for the anti-payola Smathers Bill in geo-political terms:

> If the broadcasting interests are allowed to continue their dominance and manipulation of America's musical taste, they will shortly strangle all true creative effort, and consequently jeopardize the future development of our culture. To jeopardize our culture is to weaken an intrinsic ingredient of our leadership in the world.[54]

In other words, Hayden alleges that the conspiracy among disc jockeys to corrupt the public's tastes by saturating broadcasts with rock n roll compromises America's efforts in fighting the Cold War. Similar testimony led the committee to conclude that payola was a vast "thought control operation," a finding that echoed the Hollywood Ten's alleged propagation of "radioactive ideas."[55] Like the HUAC hearings in Hollywood, during the payola hearings it was incumbent upon the accused to prove their innocence, even though there was nothing criminal about payola.

Mirroring the Senate subcommittee hearings into the mass media and juvenile delinquency, the BMI and payola hearings betrayed the inability or unwillingness of both the music establishment and the subcommittee to conceive of youths as active consumers. The music establishment alleged that rock n roll was akin to a brainwashing agent that overwhelms passive, undiscriminating and vulnerable youngsters. The subcommittee agreed, effectively displacing the social critique endemic in the young's preference for rock n roll over adult pop music. To the subcommittee, youth's consumption of rock n roll, rather than indicating young people's dissatisfaction with the banality of adult culture and desire for their own distinctive youth culture, instead suggested that pliable adolescents were victims of a vast conspiracy. Under the guise of protecting vulnerable

[54] Ennis, p.261

[55] Hill, p.64

youngsters from the evil capitalist usurpers who threatened the moral orthodoxy of consensus society, the subcommittee sponsored the major labels' restructuring of the music industry.

The payola scandal was clearly orchestrated by the music establishment to purge rock n roll of elements it found distasteful, disreputable and uncontrollable, and to reassert its dominance over the industry's main revenue streams. Contemporary commentators widely acknowledged the major labels' motives. As the editors of Billboard put it: "Many frustrated music men – out of step with current song and recording trends – see in [the payola hearings] a chance to return to a position of eminence." New York Times critic Jack Gould, an outspoken critic of rock n roll and Elvis Presley in particular, wrote that "[c]ynics in broadcasting wonder whether the disc jockeys are not relatively small fry when it comes to payoffs." Gould explained that the jockeys were targeted by "the writers of Broadway and Hollywood hit tunes – who have been dismayed to witness the dominance of rock 'n' roll on the nation's airwaves."[56]

The subcommittee's contrasting treatment of two of its principal targets, disc jockeys Alan Freed and Dick Clark, illustrated the specific aspects of rock n roll that the payola hearings were designed to eradicate. Freed embodied much of what the music establishment and the subcommittee despised about rock n roll. While Freed undoubtedly copied black disc jockeys without adequately acknowledging it, he nonetheless frequently championed black musicians on his radio show and in the live concerts he promoted. His playlists were full of sexually suggestive songs and he refused to play bland white cover versions of black songs; he made a point of banning Pat Boone records from his shows, favouring the Fats Domino and Little Richard originals over Boone's covers of "Ain't that a Shame" and "Tutti Frutti." The white rock n rollers he promoted, like Jerry Lee Lewis, tended by contemporary standards to be wild, lascivious and heavily influenced by black styles. His radio broadcasts matched this wildness. He blended black jargon with his own howls, and often left his microphone on while he played records, thumping his desk and a telephone book in time with the music. Freed's live concerts attracted interracial audiences and gained notoriety for their raucousness. Of most concern to parents, Freed actively solicited the youth audience; as one associate

[56] Altschuler, p.146

recalled, Freed "said, not in actual words but in effect, 'Fight your parents if you don't agree with them!'"[57] Freed was charged several times for incitement to riot following rowdy and violent incidents at his concerts; in 1958 he infamously sparked his youthful audience to attack police who were attempting to halt one of his shows by announcing on stage: "I guess the police here in Boston don't want you kids to have a good time." The ensuing riot further embroiled rock n roll and Freed in controversy and intensified moral crusaders' and politicians' efforts to censor the music.[58] Freed resigned from his lucrative job at prominent New York station WINS for its failure to support him following his incitement to riot charges. His next employer, WABC, fired him in 1959 during the embryonic stages of the payola scandal when he refused to sign an affidavit swearing he never accepted money or gifts to promote records on their programs.[59]

Freed was unrepentant in the face of the subcommittee's charges. He testified: "If I've helped somebody, I'll accept a nice gift, but I wouldn't take a dime to plug a record. I'd be a fool to; I'd be giving up control of my program."[60] Shortly thereafter, he was arrested for breaching New York State's commercial bribery statute, allegedly receiving over $30,000 in bribes from seven record companies in 1958 and 1959. Freed was effectively blacklisted in the east coast media along with several other disc jockeys who had refused to co-operate with the subcommittee. His television show was cancelled and Freed failed to find employment at other New York radio stations, despite his tremendous popularity among the lucrative youth market. He spent his few remaining years broadcasting in obscurity in California, fighting to clear his name in the face of further charges of tax evasion on his payola earnings. He developed uremia, a product of his alleged alcoholism, and died at age 43 in 1965.[61]

Freed's acceptance of payola was merely the pretext by which he was censured for promoting "lascivious" black music and bolstering the generational divide, as the

[57] Martin and Segrave, p.99

[58] Ibid., p.36

[59] Ibid., p.98-100

[60] Chapple and Garofalo, p.63

[61] Martin and Segrave, p.99-100

contrasting treatment of Dick Clark showed. Like Freed, Clark was a popular disc jockey who had risen to national prominence through his music television show American Bandstand. Freed was by far the more popular figure among youngsters, though. This was possibly because Clark, unlike Freed, pandered, to a large extent, to adult concerns. Clark was chosen to host American Bandstand in part because he agreed not to feature black artists or dancers on the show.[62] In the show's second season, Clark relented to civil rights protestors and allowed a black couple to dance on the show, but only under strict conditions; while the white dancers interchanged partners between songs, the black dancers were only allowed to dance with each other. Because of his initial policy against black performers, Clark tended to favour bland white cover versions to black originals and American Bandstand became increasingly identified with what was known as the 'Philadelphia sound,' a much less edgy manifestation of rock n roll. Moreover, Clark enforced a strict dress code on his show, with boys wearing ties and jackets and girls 'respectable' dresses, while neither gender was allowed to chew gum. As Clark himself explained, these measures were designed to "make the show more acceptable to adults who were frightened by the teen-age world and their music."[63]

At the height of the payola scandal, Freed exclaimed during a newspaper interview, Clark was "on 300 [television and radio] stations, I'm on one…. If I'm going to be a scapegoat, he's going to be one, too."[64] Freed and Clark were both employed by ABC, yet ABC did not require Clark to sign the payola affidavit despite Clark's comparatively corrupt practices. Just days before firing Freed, ABC released a statement exonerating Clark, even though it did not bother to investigate Clark's business dealings. Clark then received a raise in January 1960.[65]

Unlike Freed, who accepted individual payments from independent companies and the occasional song writing credit, Clark profited from his extensive investments in the music industry. These investments included ownership in thirty-three companies connected with the music business, three of which were record companies, one a

[62] Chapple and Garofalo, p.247

[63] Martin and Segrave, p.106-7

[64] Altschuler, p.151

[65] Ibid., p.153

management firm and one a record pressing plant. In the two years prior to Clark's appearance at the payola hearings in 1960, Clark's salary and increased stock value in these companies netted him over $500,000 annually.[66] In addition to this, Clark held copyright to 162 songs that he had promoted on his television and radio shows. Such investments implicated Clark in a conflict of interests. For example, Clark managed guitarist Duane Eddy, owned stock in Eddy's record company and owned the publishing rights to all of his songs. Between 1958 and 1960, Clark played eleven of Eddy's records over 240 times on his radio and television shows, helping to make them hits. A survey conducted well after the payola hearings had finished revealed that American Bandstand had featured 53% of the records Clark's three record companies had issued, "an inordinately high percentage of plays for any record company."[67] The New York Times estimated that had Clark paid ABC the going advertising rate for exposing songs from which Clark personally profited, he would have paid $25 million.[68] As Freed complained to the subcommittee, in the payola stakes he was a relative "piker" when compared to Clark's substantial dealings.[69]

Yet Clark's clean-cut appearance and slick testimony to the subcommittee, where he presented himself as an honourable businessman playing by the corporate rules of the day, had Chairman Harris laud him as a "fine young man."[70] Clark was forced to divest some of his interests, which he estimated cost him around $8 million, but Harris's endorsement cemented his role as a leading purveyor of young people's music.[71] Neither ABC nor the Federal Trade Commission bothered to confirm the extent of Clark's divesture and Clark allegedly retained vast interests in the music business.[72]

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[66] Martin and Segrave, p.93

[67] Altschuler, p.157

[68] Chapple and Garofalo, p.63

[69] Altschuler, p.154

[70] Chapple and Garofalo, p.63

[71] Ennis, p.264

[72] Altschuler, p.153

To an extent, the divergent fates of Freed and Clark were attributable to their divergent personalities; where Freed's hard drinking and unrepentant, passionate advocacy of wild rock n roll hastened his self-destruction, Clark's calculated sober business practices ensured his longevity within the industry. But the subcommittee's, and ABC's, condemnation of Freed and endorsement of Clark indicated as well a shift among the forces opposed to rock n roll. The payola hearings effectively ended the music establishment's attempts to eradicate rock n roll. The subcommittee's championing of Clark signalled their willingness to accept the existence of rock n roll. But their censure of Freed showed that the subcommittee and by extension the wider music industry would only accept a version of rock n roll purged of its more explosive elements. In the wake of the payola scandals and the varied misfortunes that stalled the careers of many stars of the first generation of rock n roll, a discernibly different style of music was marketed as "rock n roll."

The 'Philadelphia sound', Top 40 Radio and the Teen Idols

This new style of music had come to be known as the 'Philadelphia sound' for its association with Clark's American Bandstand show based in Philadelphia. Clark's show tended to promote white performers that exhibited restrained and clean-cut versions of rock n roll, like Fabian, Frankie Avalon, Ricky Nelson, Bobby Vinton and Bobby Rydell. Typical of these prefabricated 'teen idols', teenaged Fabian, who had little interest in music, was approached by a record executive from Dick Clark's Chancellor records because he had the right "look" to sell records to the youth market. Technology masked his lack of talent, as he explained: "If my voice sounds weak, they pipe it through an echo chamber to soup it up. If it sounds drab, they speed up the tape to make it sound happier. If I hit the wrong note, they snip it out and replace it by one taken from another part of the tape…. By the time they get through with the acrobatics, I can hardly recognize my own voice."[73]

Fabian's image and recordings were also carefully sculpted by marketing teams and image consultants, as was the case for Bobby Rydell and television actor Ricky Nelson. Like the show's dancers and like Clark himself, these performers conformed to

[73] Ibid., p.176

hegemonic white conventions of sensible masculine attire, with conventionally cut jackets and business ties that bore little resemblance to the colourful and wild suits that Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard had inherited from zoot suiters. Unlike these earlier rock n rollers, Fabian et al seldom shook their hips suggestively (like Presley) or smashed or set fire to their instruments (like Jerry Lee Lewis). Moreover, their hair was generally closely cropped and immaculately groomed, and was not prone to swing wildly as did Presley's when he wiggled and Lewis's when he pounded his piano. Besides Avalon's falsetto, little in the teen idols' images and styles threatened hegemonic gender conventions, or indicated any kind of rebellion whatsoever. Their songs steered clear of the "leer-ics" that so offended arbiters of good taste, favouring songs about unconsummated pre-pubescent love (like "A Teenager's Romance," "Puppy Love," and "Calendar Girl"). In short, these performers bore little resemblance to the earlier forms of rock n roll.

Adults generally welcomed the prospect of their children listening to these teen idols rather than the first wave of rock n roll stars. As Lynn Spigel argues, teen idols like Ricky Nelson (from Ozzie and Harriet) and Shelley Fabares (The Donna Reed Show) emerged from family television and this helped the idols gain acceptance among adults and worked to domesticate the whole youth culture: "Rather than fracturing domesticity, these teen idols seemed to repair it by bringing the new youth culture… into a domestic world where children sang the latest hits under the watchful gaze of their parents."[74]

In this period generally referred to as "The Lull" in rock n roll's history, some genuinely talented black and white performers had hit records, like the Coasters, Ray Charles and Roy Orbison. But, thanks in large part to the ubiquity of American Bandstand that broadcast nationally each weekday afternoon on television just after school-goers were expected to get home, the Philadelphia sound dominated.

The ascendance of the teen idols and the Philadelphia sound was also aided by Top 40 radio. During the early stages of the payola scandal, many radio stations moved to erode the disc jockeys' control of playlists to deflect charges of unfair record play. Most stations adopted the "Top 40" formula of radio programming devised by disc jockey

[74] Lynn Spigel, Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), P.178

Todd Storz at a bar in Omaha where he was drinking with his programming director Bill Stewart in the 1950s:

> They had been talking about radio all afternoon and grew irritated that the same song kept coming on the bar's jukebox, again and again, for hours. Finally there was silence in the bar, until a cocktail waitress went over to the jukebox to make a selection. She picked the same song and played it another three times. Storz and Stewart were convinced, then, of the power of endless rotation in building hits, and the attraction of a limited playlist.[75]

The idea behind the Top 40 format was that a limited selection of songs would be repeated continuously, and this selection would only change in response to the supposedly neutral indicator of popular taste, the top 40 charts. In the context of the payola hearings, the advantage was that stations could argue to congressional investigators that their playlists were determined by the consumption habits of the public rather than clandestine payments to their jockeys. This worked in the interests of the major labels' quest to regain dominance of the music industry, in that, first, it reduced stations' dependence on personality disc jockeys, many of whom had close connections to independent record labels and performers. Second, major labels found it much easier than independents to get their records into the Top 40 charts because of their superior distribution and promotion. On occasions, major labels would buy enough copies of a record to get it into the Top 40, reasoning that the ensuing high rotation on radio would help sell enough copies of the record to make it profitable. Independents lacked the capital to do this. The only independents that thrived under this environment were those affiliated with Dick Clark like Cameo and Chancellor, which enjoyed free exposure on American Bandstand.

In the context of the burgeoning cultural autonomy of the youth culture, crucially these performers were all young; when they had their first big hits, Fabian was 15, Ricky Nelson and Frankie Avalon were 17 and Bobby Rydell was 19.[76]. In other words, this was not a return to the days before rock n roll when the music establishment expected middle class whites of all ages to listen to Patti Page singing "How Much is that Doggie in the Window?" Rather, however prefabricated and timid the Philadelphia sound was as

[75] Chapple and Garofalo, p.59

[76] Oakley, p.279

the version of rock n roll that was acceptable to the music establishment, there was at least a tacit admission that there was a difference between the adult market and the youth market. The youth culture had succeeded in differentiating itself from the tastes and values of the parent culture, and in this way rock n roll remained, at least to some extent, the conduit through which the youth culture's sense of its own autonomy was expressed.

'Clean Teenpics'

In the late 1950s a new sub-genre of film, which Thomas Doherty calls the 'clean teenpic', began to dominate the teenage film market. Although the protagonists of these films bore little resemblance to the rebellious delinquents that typified youth films earlier in the decade, the clean teenpics nevertheless emphasised the youth culture's autonomy by portraying youthful protagonists navigating teenage worlds.[77] By the late 1950s, independent studios like AIP and major studios were seeking to capitalise on the music chart success of the practitioners of the Philadelphia sound by casting them in film roles that befit their tame public personae. Fabian, Frankie Avalon and the like starred in a slew of films that typically featured, according to Doherty, "fresh young faces, 'good kids' who preferred dates to drugs and crushes to crime" and "offered the prospect of a warm, familial acceptance and reconciliation with the parent culture."[78]

The musical performances in these clean teenpics[79] stressed this will toward generational reconciliation. The teen idols' songs were clearly influenced more by traditional pop styles than rhythm and blues. Some even made deliberate attempts to pander to adult tastes, as Paul Anka's performance of "Ave Maria" in Girls Town (1958) and "Rock of Ages" by Tommy Sands in Sing, Boy, Sing! (1958) testifies. Yet, these films seldom featured parents – or any adult figures – at all, underscoring the

[77] Thomas Doherty, Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), p.188

[78] Ibid., p.195, 198

[79] I make a distinction here between 'clean teenpics' (which focused on characters played by the Philadelphia sound teen idols and predominated from the last couple of years of the 1950s and early 1960s) and 'rock n roll films' (which existed from 1956 until the end of the decade, and showcased various rock n roll performers in a narrative that generally furnished the occasion for these star performances).

generational specificity of these films and the relative autonomy of the youth culture in general.

The ascendance of the clean teenpic is partly attributable to the plethora of juvenile delinquency films that saturated theatres in the latter half of the 1950s. In other words, by the end of the decade the delinquency film cycle had run its course and lost its novelty and shock value. The delinquency film also became somewhat anachronistic; by 1960 juvenile delinquency hysteria had mellowed as the shock of the new youth culture subsided and the youth culture's most prominent manifestation, rock n roll, grew increasingly tame as the major labels regained control of the music industry.

Moreover, when these clean teenpics emerged at the end of the 1950s youth was generally more praised than demonised. As youth market researcher Eugene Gilbert noted in 1959, some parents were more worried that their children were too conservative and conformist than rebellious.[80] Dick Clark shared this opinion as he averred that teenagers in the early 1960s were less wild than a few years previous, but, unlike some parents who worried about their children's conformity, Clark welcomed what he saw as the young's increasing conservatism. Clark attributed the shift in their behaviour to the policies of American Bandstand that echoed the social engineering project of Dress Right, a conservative dress code that many high schools adopted during the 1950s to combat juvenile delinquency:

> The thing I've noticed is that the kids are calming down. Their dress is more conservative. We don't let them on the show unless they're reasonably well-dressed – leather jackets are out – but we never have much trouble of this kind…. These kids are alright. They wash behind their ears. They don't cut their classes. They wear neckties.[81]

Although Clark believed that all the "kids are calming down," it was more likely that American Bandstand's dress codes were repelling wilder teenagers. Like Dress Right, the show's dress code was less successful in transforming adolescent behaviour than in guarding the 'clean' middle class youth from the black and working class teenagers whom adults saw as trouble. Seeing these conservative teenagers dance on his show five days a week, Clark, along with many other adults, saw them as representative of the

[80] Doherty, p.198

[81] Ibid., p.200

whole youth culture. For their part, these 'clean teens' were less inclined to emulate black and working class culture; afforded a distinct and intrinsic space in American culture, these middle class white adolescents did not feel the need to rebel.

The popularity of two Pat Boone films released in 1957, Bernadine and April Love, showed film producers that representations of this well-behaved section of the youth culture could be profitable. Boone's characters in both films were the antithesis of the juvenile delinquent stereotype. Boone represented solidly upper-middle class characters who preferred yachting to drag-racing, studying to knife-fighting and holding hands to 'heavy petting' (Boone, a devout Christian, refused to kiss in front of the camera[82]). Despite its self-acknowledged tameness, Boone's films scored well at the box office. Although the values espoused in the films differed little from that of the parent culture, teenagers were still likely attracted, as one contemporary reviewer of Bernadine put it, by "such symbols as sneakers and sweaters, cokes and hamburgers, juke boxes, high school clubs, problems of dating, and the desire to own a car."[83] In other words, the films depicted teenaged characters within their peer group and acknowledged the centrality of the distinctive youth culture that was at least seen to operate independent of adults, even though the autonomy of the youth culture was increasingly diluted by the end of the 1950s. The success of these Boone films provided producers with a viable generic alternative to the juvenile delinquent and weirdie films that were saturating their production schedules.

Clean teenpics were equally the product of studios' desire to capitalise on the prominence of the teen idols in other media. Studios could reasonably expect free publicity emanating from the exposure of teen idols through their record singles on Top 40 radio formats and appearances on television music shows. Certainly, teen idols signed to companies in which Dick Clark held shares frequently appeared on American Bandstand, and this helped promote their films. For example, to advertise Fabian's Hound Dog Man (1959), American Bandstand held a competition over a number of weeks inviting the film's target audience – young girls – to write in explaining "Why I

[82] Ibid., p.188

[83] Ibid., p.189

Would Like to Have a Date with Fabian."[84] Such "transmedia" exposure and free advertising impelled studios to invest in clean teenpics.[85]

While previous rock n roll films tended to punctuate the narrative with rousing musical interludes from rock n roll stars only tangentially related to the plot, clean teenpics usually relied on the star to carry the musical performances. Films like Sing, Boy, Sing! and Hound Dog Man featured musical performances from its teen idols only, whereas rock n roll films featured many acts, black and white. Go, Johnny, Go! (1959), for example, which details the fictional rise of Jimmy Clanton – a similarly banal performer as Tommy Sands and Fabian – nevertheless showcased genuinely talented acts like Jackie Wilson, Eddie Cochran, the Cadillacs and Richie Valens. Clean teenpics' reliance on their teen idols not only provided little musical variety but also worked to exclude black artists who were rarely integrated into the plot of rock n roll films but nonetheless provided electrifying diversions from generally tedious plots.[86] By excising black culture from representations of the youth culture, clean teenpics performed a similar function in films as the advent of the Philadelphia sound and Top 40 radio did in music.

One of the last in the cycle of juvenile delinquent films, High School Caesar (1960), betokened the advent of clean teenpics. Unlike earlier delinquency films that allowed viewers to celebrate the juvenile delinquent protagonist by detailing his or her rebellion against adult authority, High School Caesar explicitly works to establish its protagonist as an unsympathetic character. Rich trust-fund kid Matt Stevens (John Ashley) leads, as the film's trailer puts it, a pack of "gangland flunkies beating up kids for chump change." Unlike earlier juvenile delinquents, Matt and his gang do not confront officious teachers and adult authorities, but rather prey on their fellow teens. Along with rigging his Class President elections with the help of his girlfriend who works as the principal's secretary, Matt garners 'protection money' from fellow students he and his goons torment, and embezzles money from school dance fundraisers. Although belligerent to his peers,

[84] Ibid., p.214

[85] Doherty calls this teen idol exposure across a variety of media "transmedia exposure." Doherty, p.201

[86] See, for example, Little Richard's performances in The Girl Can't Help It and Don't Knock the Rock. One of the few exceptions to this was Go, Johnny, Go!, where Chuck Berry acts as a pivotal member of the cast, providing Alan Freed with career advice as well as contributing musical performances.

bullying them to vote for him in the class elections, Matt is sycophantic in the presence of teachers and the principal, making him even more unsympathetic to teenage viewers used to seeing delinquents sneering at officialdom.

High School Caesar foreshadows the clean teenpic not only by depicting Matt unsympathetically. Unlike other juvenile delinquent films where the delinquent is obligatorily punished by the police or adult authorities, Matt's undoing comes at the hands of his clean teen peers. Matt's downfall is foreshadowed when he strikes a straight-laced teenage girl in the face during a school dance, prompting disdainful stares from his fellow students. Matt is finally disgraced when his peers learn that his reckless driving caused the death of a popular clean teen, whom Matt left to die in a ditch. When Matt turns up at his own birthday party, no one is there. Outside, a group of his fellow students confront him, and a clean teen dressed conservatively in slacks and a cardigan beats Matt while Matt's gang look on.[87]

The film reflects the attitudinal shift toward youth culture occurring in American society at the turn of the decade. Although High School Caesar depicts the menacing delinquents that characterised 1950s attitudes toward youth, unlike earlier delinquency films, the majority of the young condemn and ostracise the delinquents. The film also marks a shift in attitudes surrounding sartorial styles. Matt and his gang sport the typical juvenile delinquent outfit: greasy DAs, leather jackets, jeans and motorcycle boots. While in The Wild One this outfit underscored the gang's glamorous rebellion, here it denotes the brutal harassment of the student body. In the opening scene, the camera focuses on the gang's motorcycle boots that resemble Nazi storm-troopers as a military staccato beat accompanies the gang as they march in unison. The next scene further emphasises the fascist implications of the gang's uniform, as Matt's gang intimidate a student, threatening to beat him if he does not vote for Matt in the forthcoming student elections and coercing him to deface an opponent's campaign poster.

If High School Caesar signalled the shifting connotations of juvenile delinquent style from rebellious to fascist, AIP's Beach Party cycle of films (which premiered in 1963) portrayed the delinquent style as laughably out of date. In many ways the

[87] High School Caesar. Dir. O'Dale Ireland. Perf. John Ashley, Steve Stevens, Daria Massey. Marathon Pictures, 1960.

archetypal clean teenpics, the Beach Party films featured teen idol Frankie Avalon and former Mickey Mouse Club teenaged television star Annette Funicello as popular beach-dwelling teenagers who engage in clean, good-natured fun that did not involve smoking, drinking, crime, sex or cigarettes (John Ashley, who starred in early juvenile delinquent films as well as the new clean teenpics, noted that producers were so committed to portraying teens as virtuous that they forbade its young stars from smoking on set[88]). This series of films parodied The Wild One's BRMC with bumbling biker gang the 'Ratz and Mice', who fail, first, to fit in with the teenagers' beach culture and then to spoil their fun, as recurrent characters. Middle-aged comedian Harvey Lembeck played gang leader Eric Von Zipper, a paunchy, balding, illiterate leather-jacketed biker who is always trying to ruin the clean teens' fun. When his ill-founded plans inevitably go awry, he turns on his gang, admonishing them as "you stupids!" The merciless parody of the biker image in the inept Ratz and Mice marks a significant shift in representations of the youth culture. No longer symbolic of rebellion, the biker image is instead passé, representative of a by-gone phase of the youth culture now ridiculously anachronistic.

Yet, the modification of the youth culture was not a complete commercial success. Rock n roll sales fell by 5 percent in 1960 (when decidedly non-rock n roll song "A Summer Place" by Percy Faith was the best-selling song) and remained sluggish until the Beatles and Motown artists ascended the charts in 1964 and beckoned a new youth culture formation.[89] Also, many of the clean teenpics featuring teen idols bombed at the box office, including Sing, Boy, Sing! with Tommy Sands, 1959's Yellowstone Kelly featuring TV star Edd "Kookie" Byrnes (of 77 Sunest Strip fame) and the Fabian vehicle Hound Dog Man. While the failure of these films is in part due to the fact that their target audience of prepubescent girls were not regular moviegoers like their teenaged counterparts[90], it also marks a decline in enthusiasm for this new tepid youth culture product. Although clean teenpics like Beach Party scored hits and the teen idols sold well enough to consolidate the pre-eminence of the youthful consumer in the music industry,

[88] Mark McGee and R. J. Robertson, The J.D. Films: Juvenile Delinquency in the Movies (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1982), p.99

[89] Altschuler, p.176

[90] Contemporary critics and executives at Fox, which produced Fabian's films, suggested that this coupled with the general indifference toward these minor teen idols likely caused these films to fail. Doherty, p.214

clearly the youth market was not as profitable as it had been when independent music labels promoted black-styled music and juvenile delinquents and weirdie monsters dominated the drive-in theatres. In the case of the music industry, however, this was only a minor setback, for the music establishment had regained control of the industry's charts and distribution arms, and had mastered promoting to a variety of media to reach the teenage marketplace with product denuded of its explosive elements.

"The Twist"

Considering the extent to which the dominance of the Philadelphia sound, Top 40 radio and clean teenpics 'whitened' rock n roll and portrayals of the youth culture, it was ironic that the biggest hit of the era was black vocalist Chubby Checker's "The Twist." "The Twist" went to number one in the pop charts in September 1960 and then again in January 1962, becoming the best selling record of that year, after it was re-released on the back of the success of its sequel, "Let's Twist Again." Although the song was the sixth best selling record of 1960, this was not the first time it had appeared in the music industry's charts. Hank Ballard, who had enjoyed notoriety through his controversial rhythm and blues songs like "Annie Had a Baby," wrote and recorded the song in 1958. Desperate to crossover to the white rock n roll market, Ballard had rewritten the song several times to excise its overtly suggestive elements and please his record company Veejay. The record sold well in the rhythm and blues market but Veejay did little promotion to help it into the pop charts.

Dick Clark was instrumental in the song's eventual success. On the set of Clark's show American Bandstand he noticed some teenagers dancing to Ballard's song, which was by then two years old. The dancers told Clark that he needed to feature songs like this to which they could dance. Viewing Ballard's original as too earthy for his show, Clark promptly ordered a cover version from one of his companies, Chancellor-Parkway Records. They recorded the song with black lounge club singer Ernest Evans, a former classmate of Fabian and Frankie Avalon at South Philadelphia High School, who was better known as "Chubby." Dick Clark's wife suggested that Evans be rechristened "Chubby Checker" as a play on Fats Domino's name. Following its extensive airplay on Clark's television and radio shows, the song enjoyed tremendous success, despite initially

encountering some resistance from moral crusaders who considered the song lascivious. Ballard, holidaying in Miami, heard the song coming from a white radio station across a swimming pool and assumed that his song had finally crossed over into the white market. His visions of stardom were thwarted when the disc jockey announced that the song belonged to Chubby Checker.[91]

The tremendous success of the second release of the song is largely attributable to its appeal among adults. The Twist, followed by similar dance crazes like the Mashed Potato, the Swim and the Watusi, became chic activities at fashionable white haunts like the Peppermint Lounge, and the appeal of these dances spread throughout white popular culture. As Dick Clark stated, "The Twist" was significant because "it was the first time in musical history that all generations could freely admit that they liked rock n roll."[92] Eldridge Cleaver noted that although blacks remained largely unmoved by Checker's prefabricated image, to whites The Twist

> was a guided missile, launched from the ghetto into the very heart of suburbia. The Twist succeeded, as politics, religion and law could never do, in writing in the heart and soul what the Supreme Court could only write on their books. The Twist was a form of therapy for a convalescing nation. The Omnipotent Administrator and the Ultrafeminine [whites] responded so dramatically, in stampede fashion, to The Twist precisely because it afforded them the possibility of reclaiming their Bodies again after generations of alienated and disembodied existence …. They came from every level of society, from top to bottom, writhing pitifully though gamely about the floor, feeling exhilarating and soothing new sensations, release from some unknown prison in which their Bodies had been encased, a sense of freedom they had never known before, a feeling of communion with some mystical root-source of life and vigor, from which sprang a new appreciation of their Bodies. They were swinging and gyrating their dead little asses like petrified zombies trying to regain the warmth of life, rekindle the dead limbs, the cold ass, the stone heart, the stiff, mechanical, disused joints with the spark of life.[93]

The Twist was the first popular acknowledgement of a youth culture product among adults. It reflected a trend that intensified throughout the early 1960s of popular culture, especially through advertising, films and television, positively valuing the state

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[91] This is recounted in The History of Rock n' Roll. Episode Two, "Good Rockin' Tonight." Dir. Bud Friedgen. Time-Life DVD, 2004.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Eldridge Cleaver, Soul on Ice (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), p.197

of youth and its cultural products. To an extent, this could be regarded as adults incorporating youth culture, which precipitated another youth culture rebellion in the late 1960s as student activism and the hippie movement escalated. Yet the key products and rituals that defined the youth culture – and especially its primary cultural site for expressing youth's generational distinctiveness and cultural autonomy, rock n roll – were not created by young people. It was, after all, adults who named rock n roll and introduced it to suburban white America. However, although rock n roll was not 'pure' youth culture in that adults acted as intermediaries between performer and audience, it was initially peripheral to the music establishment. Significantly, adults crucial to disseminating rock n roll, like disc jockeys Alan Freed, Rufus Thomas and Dewey Phillips, and producers Sam Phillips and the Chess brothers were alienated from the music industry's establishment. The Twist, although it emanated from American Bandstand which was a youth cultural space, was an example of youth culture that had been purged of its dangerous, rebellious elements. It was aligned with the values of the music establishment through Clark's controlled management and as such it was able to be assimilated into adult mainstream culture.

The Twist suggested that rock n roll was no longer a rebellious cultural force exclusively for teenagers. In a sense this was fitting because the story of the song's success typified many of the ironies, as well as many of the racially problematic aspects, of rock n roll. Ballard, a seasoned rhythm and blues performer notorious for his sexually suggestive songs, saw a domesticated and insipid version of his song that was recorded unbeknownst to him achieve the success he had long sought. Because of his publishing deal with his record company, he saw few royalties. Dick Clark, whose pre-eminence in the industry was largely attributable to his refusal to promote black music, helped prefabricate a black performer who was palatable to not only white youth but also white adults. Despite being a product of white corporatism, Checker, as a black man, was received by white suburbanites as "a guided missile, launched from the ghetto," in Cleaver's words. Mirroring widespread racial ideologies that cast blacks as bearers of pre-industrial carnal pleasure and simply as "Bodies," Checker's song, despite its vapidity, and Checker himself, despite his docility, provided the conduit through which

whites shook "their dead little asses" and gained "a new appreciation of the possibilities of their Bodies."

Cleaver's passage provides a vivid summation of the stakes of white teenagers' investment in black music in the 1950s. Defying fervent protests from racists and segregationists, some young whites (if they were cognisant of racial politics at all) may have regarded their patronage of black music as "writing in the heart and soul what the Supreme Court could only write on their books" and, when viewed in relation to the bigotry and intolerance of anti-rock crusaders, it was. Troubling this integrationist view is the inequitable economy at work. If young whites imagined themselves engaged in an act of social progressivism, what they gained was more precisely in the arena of self-definition than in social justice and racial equality: subversion of the parent culture's values; cultivation of an autonomous youth identity; and, from Cleaver's point of view, bodies defrosted from their cryogenised whiteness. All this was yielded from watching either an underpaid black performer stage 'blackness' in a performance circumscribed by both white racism and white romanticism, or a better-paid white 'releasing' himself by donning a mask of blackness, often to an all-white audience.

Adult America embraced "The Twist," marking a collective re-evaluation of the youth culture as a positive, optimistic entity to be celebrated. On the one hand, this re-evaluation is indicative of the rehabilitation of youth that occurred at the end of the 1950s. The restructuring of the music industry, the mellowing of juvenile delinquency hysteria and the new 'clean teen' stereotype planed the rough edges off youth's societal image, grooming the young for a rapprochement with adults.

On the other hand, the new image of youth was indicative of adult America's emergence from the shadow of containment. In the wake of the frosty Cold War climate induced by McCarthyism, the crisis of masculinity and the threat of nuclear apocalypse, vibrant youth cultural products like "The Twist" offered adults, as it had 1950s teenagers, the chance in the 1960s to "just stand up and shake the ice and cancer out of their alienated white asses."[94]

[94] Ibid., p.199-200

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